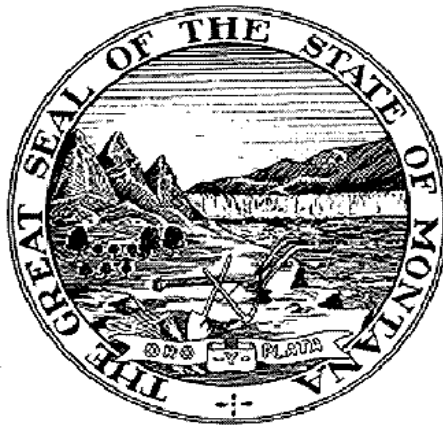# Excellence for All

Montana Initiative for School Improvement

Montana's State Program Improvement Grant

December 15, 1999

Introduction

As a group, Montanans are aptly characterized as fiercely independent. This sentiment creates a prevailing climate that favors local control. It is probably safe to say that any idea originating inside the Washington DC beltway starts out with at least one strike against it for many Montanans.

This is the picture many outsiders have of Montana. Its citizens, however, would add detail that substantially alters this image. While independent, Montanans are self-reliant. They are used to coming up with unique solutions to problems that arise in remote settings where resources are very limited or simply unavailable. Montanans value education. Eighty percent of adults in the state have completed high school, and 20% have college degrees (Nielson et al., 1999). Montanans value family. Ninety-two percent of Montana's children under the age of 18 live with their parents; eighty percent of these children live with two parents. Montanans fiscally support education, despite limited resources. The average income for Montanans is $33,358, over $10,000 less than the national average (U.S. Census, 1990). Per pupil expenditures in Montana average $5,677, ranking Montana 46th in the nation on this variable. Despite this fact, only three states spend a larger percentage of its total taxable resources on education (Education Week, 1998). Finally, Montana students demonstrate strong academic performance. They have scored within the top six states on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) since this measure has been conducted as a state-by-state test at both the 4th and 8th grade levels. As described in the Statewide Educational Profile (Nielson et al., 1999), "On all standardized, norm-referenced measures - state tests, college readiness tests, or national assessments - Montana students score near the top (pg. 28)."

If these data were a completely comprehensive set of indicators against which Montana's school services were assessed, it would appear that all is well. We know, however, that this is not the case for *all* students or *all* schools in the state. The gap between white and Native American students

is substantial, reflected in data more readily available at this point in time than data about other subgroups of students, such as those with disabilities. While Montana can certainly lay claim to many excellent schools and high performing students, to what extent is excellence available to *all*?

Several years after the publication of <u>A Nation at Risk</u> (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), Montana began its journey down the path of educational reform. *Project Excellence: Designing Education for the Next Century* was initiated during the 1987-88 school year, beginning with a comprehensive review of the state accreditation standards and the initial development of program area standards and model learner goals. (See Appendix D for a longitudinal perspective of Montana's educational reform initiative.) Today, the first comprehensive revision of these standards is well underway. At the same time, federal requirements in the area of assessment within both the Title I program and IDEA have or will soon change, requiring states to disaggregate data and report results for students on the basis of gender, race/ethnicity, economic disadvantage, migrant status, limited English proficiency status, and disability. The convergence of these events with the more systemic focus and requirements of IDEA 1997 create a circumstance in which need and vision intersect, presenting an ideal opportunity for collaborative planning and problem-solving among Montana educators to create schools that are responsive to the needs of diverse learners.

Toward that end, this project is designed around three major purposes. First, the project is focused on aligning activities and practices within general and special education to create a unified and coherent agenda of school improvement in Montana. The project's title - *Excellence for <u>All</u>*, is intended to communicate this intent. The second purpose of this project is to target specific areas of need unique to the delivery of services to students with disabilities, creating new partnerships, approaches, and solutions to improve outcomes in areas known to be in need of improvement. Third, a sufficient quantity of trained personnel who utilize practices that are known to be associated with successful student outcomes is necessary to ensure quality services for students in this state. This

project will target challenges that Montana faces in the area of personnel preparation, recruitment, retention, and professional development.

The remainder of this narrative will summarize the data and decision-making that led to the identification of priorities and design of this proposal for funding to support the implementation of Montana's State Improvement Plan (Need and Significance sections). It will then describe the approach and scope of the plan, identifying project goals, objectives, and anticipated outcomes (Project Design). The people involved in the project (Project Personnel section) and the resources (Adequacy of Resources section) of the applicant and its collaborating partners are then described. The approach to project management and project evaluation are addressed in the final two sections of this narrative. The reader is referred to the Reviewer's Guide at the beginning of this proposal to assist in locating specific information in order to evaluate this application.

1.0 Need for Project

In developing Montana's State Improvement Plan (SIP), the analysis of state needs was guided by the three major purposes of this document, identified in the preceding paragraphs. Many sources of data are referenced in this section. A complete listing of all data sources considered in formulating this plan is provided in Appendix I. Although demographic information about Montana will be cited throughout this section, a set of tables with basic demographic information about Montana schools and students with disabilities in Montana schools is provided in Appendix E and F, respectively. Similarly, the geography of the state is described in detail in Appendix G, since it presents unique circumstances that impact practices in Montana. This allows the narrative pages to focus on a discussion and analysis of service delivery in this highly rural state in a relatively uninterrupted manner.

1.1 Standards Based Reform in Montana

In Education Week's annual review of public education in the 50 states (Education Week,

1998), the headline for Montana reads "Outgunned by the Lawmen". Despite concerted efforts by Republican governor Marc Racicot and Democratic State Superintendent Nancy Keenan, the 1998 legislature did not respond to their request for a 4.5% increase in education funding and $1.6 million to review the state's learner goals, align tests to these goals, and prepare a state education profile. Instead, they allocated only $350,000 for these tasks, an amount characterized by Nancy Keenan as "an insult".

Since the legislature only meets for 90 days every two years, this left the state in the continued position of recovery from a $50 million dollar budget cut made in 1993 to close a state budget gap. This also left the state with few funds available to support its ongoing reform initiatives. In this heavily conservative state with a longstanding tradition of strong performance in education, the academic standards movement does not have universal support. Nevertheless, substantial progress has been made in refining a framework of performance standards that represent the cornerstone of Montana's standards-based reform effort. Montana's practices relative to each of the three components of standards-based reform - standards, assessment, and accountability (McDonnell & McLaughlin, 1997), are briefly reviewed.

Montana Standards Framework

The Montana Standards Framework, initiated with Project Excellence in 1987, establishes a common set of standards that articulate what students in schools throughout the state should know by certain points in their school career (i.e., 4th, 8th, 11th grades). As shown in Table 1, the state is two thirds of the way through a cycle of standards revision. This table also delineates the content areas in which standards have been developed. Throughout the process, involvement from the field has driven this activity. All initial writing/revision work is done by teams of Montana teachers representing grades K-16. Draft standards then go through a public review process before being presented to the State Board of Education.

Table 1: Montana's Schedule for Standards Revision

Cycle	Content Area	Board Adoption
1	Reading; Mathematics	Fall, 1998
2	Communication Arts; Science; Health Enhancement; Technology; World Languages	Fall, 1999
3	Arts; Social Studies; Library Media; Work Pace Competency	Fall, 2000

Montana's content standards are general statements of what a student should know, understand, and be able to do in each identified content area. Benchmarks define expectations for student proficiency at designated points during elementary, middle, and high school. The standards are not accompanied by a statewide curriculum. Faulted as being far *too* general by organizations such as the American Federation of Teachers, the Fordham Foundation, and Education Week Magazine (Anez, 1999), the state's position is that this lack of specificity is purposeful, and is critical to provide districts the flexibility necessary to apply these standards to a curriculum that reflects local priorities.

Despite the involvement of teachers in the development of the state's standards, many teachers are not aware of the standards and/or the implications of this work for them. Educators throughout Montana need to understand how these new state standards relate to their current curriculum and instructional practices. Professional development is the next major phase in this school improvement initiative (Peterson, 1999). With very few resources to work with (this initiative is supported by a very small staff in the School Improvement Division to meet the needs of the entire state), the current plan to address this need involves filling one professional development position within the SEA, and taking advantage of the voluntary but collaborative relationships that exist between OPI, professional

organizations, and LEAs in the state. Key representatives of these groups will, as they did during the writing phase of this process, convene with state personnel at OPI to develop materials and strategies to disseminate to districts throughout the state. Schools will need to supplement these efforts with professional development activities and resources at the local level.

Special Education Involvement in Standards

On a national level, an analysis of state practices relative to the involvement of special education in the development of standards revealed that only 17% of the states included special educators in the standards development process (Thurlow et al., 1997b). In this regard, Montana has fallen in with the majority. A second level of analysis examined the extent to which states specified *who* would be held to these performance standards (Thurlow et al., 1997a). Most states (77%) use the word *all*, but only 8% specifically mention students with disabilities in the document. Twenty-three percent of the states, including Montana, use the term "students" in the document, making no specification of either *all* students *or* students with disabilities. Finally, only 20% of the states provide information on accommodations that might be needed to enable all students the opportunity to reach these standards.

Despite the absence of a strong voice in this process, Montana's decision to, as described by Superintendent Keenan, " take the road less traveled" (Anex, 1999, A-9) by opting for a broad rather than prescriptive approach to the language of its standards, bodes very well for those whose primary involvement is with students with disabilities. As described in the narrative accompanying a framework developed to analyze state policies and their relationship to the development of inclusive schooling practices (CISP, 1996), broad standards enable schools to select the specific instructional approaches and materials that are matched to the varied needs and learning styles represented within their school population. It also assures that districts will be able to be culturally sensitive in their choices.

As need and vision once again intersect, the timing is right for special and general educators to work together to respond to the needs of Montana educators in the area of performance standards. Specifically:

\#   ***There is a critical need among Montana educators to understand the implications of content and performance standards on their practice.***

\#   ***There is a critical need among Montana educators to understand their responsibility in considering the needs of the entire student population as they align local curricula and instructional methods to new state standards.***

\#   ***It is essential that special educators and parents receive the training and support necessary to become active participants in this process, advocating for the adoption of curriculum and instructional practices that acknowledge the varied needs and learning styles of all students, including those with disabilities.***

\#   ***Schools actively working to successfully integrate students with disabilities within their overall reform efforts and accountability systems must be supported, serving as a model for others working toward the same ends.***

Assessment Practices

In a well-balanced system, increased flexibility at the local level is typically paired with high degrees of accountability. As applied to standards-based reform, this means that schools must document and be held responsible for student results. All accredited Montana schools are required to report norm-referenced scores for students in grades 4, 8, and 11 in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies. Compliance among schools is almost universal.

Results indicate that Montana consistently reports average student scores well above the national average (Nielson et al., 1999). But even as one of the country's top scoring states, nearly 30% of Montana's 4th graders performed below the basic level on the 1994 NAEP reading test

(Education Week, 1998). Further, the performance gap between white and Native American students, a group that comprises 10% of the K-12 student population, is a longstanding concern among Montana educators. Native American students are 3.6 times more likely than white students to drop out of high school, and 5 times more likely to drop out in 7th or 8th grade. Schools with high percentages of Native American students represent a large proportion of those schools that, for Title I purposes, are categorized as "improvement status" (OPI, 1999d). This means that the average NCE score in reading and/or math was below the 45th percentile.

In 1997, the Montana Legislature passed legislation requiring the release of school level test score results. Test data from the 1995-96 school year was the first information reported under this new rule. The strongest concern that has emerged from this practice is the issue of variability across districts in the standardized test used to measure student progress. During the 1996-97 school year, five different norm referenced tests were used across the state. Obviously, this complicates the issue of score comparison. By Spring of 2000, the vendor who successfully wins the state bid for a single statewide test will be identified. At the present time, preparation for the bidding process is underway, and the appropriateness of the test for varied student populations (e.g., Title I, special education) will be one of the selection criteria. Since the test to be used is not yet known, only estimates can be made about the number of districts who will be forced to change their testing practices in the upcoming year. A recent newspaper article reported a state spokesperson as saying that between 60 to 80 percent of school districts in Montana will be impacted by this new ruling.

Other changes in student testing and assessment reporting are occurring as a result of new Title I requirements. By the year 2000-01, Title I assessment reporting will require disaggregated testing results based on the following variables: gender, race, economic status, migrant status, LEP status, and disability.

Assessment Practices for Students with Disabilities

IDEA 1997 required the reporting of statewide assessment information for students with disabilities beginning with the 1998-99 school year. To maximize participation and optimize performance of students with disabilities in statewide assessments, districts must provide the necessary accommodations to enable students with disabilities to accurately demonstrate their abilities. Scores for students with disabilities must be reported in a disaggregated manner by districts. Furthermore, guidelines for participation of students with disabilities in alternate assessment must be in place by the 2000-01 school year.

Since these requirements are new, comprehensive "baseline" performance data on students with disabilities in Montana are not yet available. Prior to this new requirement, practices varied considerably across the state as to whether students with disabilities were or were not involved in district testing. Variability also existed in the extent to which scores for students with disabilities that were tested were included in district reporting, and whether accommodations were provided for testing. These practices are congruent with national studies that suggest that more students with disabilities *can* be included in large-scale assessments than typically *have* been included (Olson & Goldstein, 1997).

Discussions within the state Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Council meetings suggest that districts are not completely clear about new requirements and the issue of accommodations. Once a single statewide test is selected, it will be a more manageable task to provide clear guidelines to districts. In the area of alternate assessment practices (i.e., tests for students with the most significant disabilities for whom general assessments do not measure the most meaningful skills), final procedures and guidelines have not yet been completed. It is evident that the upcoming changes in Montana's statewide assessment practices create a situation in which a substantial amount of work will need to occur in the period of time immediately after the new statewide assessment has been identified. In the area of assessment, the following critical needs

emerge:

\#   *All educators in Montana need to become familiar with the test selected for statewide use, and work to align their curriculum with areas that are included on the test.*

\#   *District personnel must be clear about their responsibilities to include students with disabilities in statewide assessments and report their results to the state.*

\#   *District personnel need guidelines to assist in providing necessary and appropriate accommodations for the testing of students with disabilities.*

\#   *Information about new policies and practices must be developed and communicated in a way that can be easily understood by IEP team members, including parents.*

\#   *Procedures for alternative assessment must be developed and shared with local districts*

\#   *Strategies to include this information in school reports must be developed.*

\#   *Districts must receive the necessary information and support to develop information management systems that support new data reporting requirements.*

School Improvement Initiatives

Schools at risk of and/or in need of support for improvement in Montana are classified within one of several categories by OPI. Under the Title I program, schools with a large percentage of students from low income families receive Title funding as either a *targeted assistance* or *school-wide* program. These dollars are focused on preventing and remediating academic performance problems among students. Further, those schools that report average math and/or reading scores below the 41st percentile for two consecutive years are targeted as Title I *school improvement* sites. If more than 50% of schools within a single district are targeted for improvement, the district becomes identified as an *improvement district*. A small staff of OPI program specialists, supplemented by the efforts of a network of consultant- distinguished educators identified by OPI, are available to provide on-site support to districts to assist in training, technical assistance, and/or the development of a school improvement plan. At the present time, approximately 60 schools are identified for improvement by OPI. Finally, there are a small number of schools that receive funding as Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration (CSRD) sites. These schools are approaching reform and professional development in a broad-based manner as a means of improving student performance, and have successfully competed for a small amount of supplementary funding to support their efforts.

Special Education Monitoring

The Division of Special Education has begun the planning process to transform what was previously a date-driven, compliance-oriented approach to district monitoring, to one that mirrors the outcome-oriented, continuous improvement monitoring process that is now used by OSEP when they conduct monitoring of individual states (Hehir, 1998). Having recently completed the self-assessment process and associated analysis for its OSEP monitoring in the Spring of 1999, OPI staff are in a good position to apply that orientation to its future monitoring activities. Furthermore, the

timing of these changes coincides with the increased responsibility of districts to report and be

accountable for the outcomes of all of its students. In order to effectively shift the focus of

monitoring to continuous improvement planning and integrate this process within the larger arena of

school improvement, the opportunity now exists to:

Develop the capacity of staff at the state and local levels to use facilitation, data

         interpretation, problem-solving, and long term planning skills to shift on-site program

         reviews from an orientation toward paper compliance to one of continuous improvement

         and outcome assessment.

Work collaboratively with those involved in Title I and other general education reforms to

         unify their efforts in a focus on whole school improvement.

1.2 Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

While there are many important needs associated with the integration of special education

within the larger arena of general education reform, there are also critical issues to address in

Montana specific to the delivery of special education services and the outcomes currently

experienced by students with disabilities. In preparation for the OSEP monitoring which occurred in

March of 1999, the Division of Special Education conducted a comprehensive self-assessment (OPI,

1999). Much of this information is integrated in the discussion that follows.

In order to consider outcomes for students with disabilities within the larger state context, the

table below identifies key outcome indicators for *all* students, presenting available information for

students with and without disabilities. Data for students without disabilities are taken from the

Montana Statewide Education Profile (Nielson et al., 1999) unless otherwise referenced. Similarly,

data for students with disabilities are taken from Montana's Self-Assessment Special Education

Profile (1999b) unless otherwise noted. Unfortunately, in several key areas that contribute to a

comprehensive examination and comparison of student outcomes, sufficient information is not yet

readily available to special education leaders at the state or local levels. While much of this missing

information has begun to be collected as a result of new IDEA 97 requirements, it will take time

before these data are complete and can be reviewed with great confidence. This information is

followed by a discussion of specific programmatic areas that have emerged as key areas of need in

order to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Table 2:   Comparison of Outcomes for Montana Students With and Without Disabilities

Outcome Indicator	Students with Disabilities	Students without Disabilities
Performance on statewide assessments	Required for the first time in Montana in 1998, data not yet available for reporting	Students in grades 4, 8, and 11 scored 10-16% above the national average in all subjects
Drop out Rate	20% of those exiting special education during 1997-98 dropped out	State average = 5.5%; there are areas where levels are substantially higher
Graduation Rate	diploma: 56% of 18-21 yr olds receiving special ed services certificate: 6% of 18-21 yr olds receiving special ed services	93.6% of students who reach their senior year graduate
Participation in postsecondary education	data not available	71% of students enter school within 2 years of graduation
Post-school employment	data not available	30% of 16-19 year olds are in labor force

Transition Services

It is evident from the data presented in Table 2 that much remains to be known about the extent to which students with disabilities in Montana are successful in their transition from school to the world of work and/or postsecondary education. Despite the absence of statewide data from all LEAs, information from other sources, as well as nationally based data, reveal critical needs in this area. In Montana, the OSEP monitoring team identified transition as a statewide need after completing a series of state hearings and on-site reviews in a sample of school districts. The monitoring team observed that planning for transition was not adequately focused on successful post-school outcomes. The educational program provided to secondary-aged students with disabilities did not constitute a set of *coordinated services* that logically prepare students for post-school activities. Uneven participation of adult service providers during IEP meetings was evident. Low levels of students involvement in meetings and decision-making during the transition years were noted as part of the state self-assessment process (OPI, 1999b). A final corroborating source of data is a parent and educator survey conducted by Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC) prior to the OSEP monitoring team visit. Among the 102 parent respondents whose children were in secondary programs, two thirds rated their schools' secondary transition program as poor. One-third of the special education teacher respondents also rated secondary transition programs as poor. Narrative comments cited problems in school and adult service programs, as well as the lack of work experience sites for students, particularly in rural areas.

While these outcomes are disturbing, they are, unfortunately, not atypical. Two thirds of the states whose monitoring reports were issued during the 1997 fiscal year included findings and needs in the area of transition (USDOE, 1998). Follow-up studies of diverse populations of students with disabilities (Blackokrby & Wagner, 1996) as well as specific subgroups such as students with emotional disturbance (e.g., Malmgren et al., 1998), continue to document outcomes substantially less desirable than those experienced by peers without disabilities. This suggests a considerable gap

between what is known and what has been put into practice in the area of transition services, despite federal investment in at least 549 projects focused on the issue of transition (Halpern, 1999).

In articulating the need for improvement in this area within Montana, it is helpful to draw upon the valuable lessons and successful strategies that have been documented in the many model programs implemented across the last 15 years (Cobb et al., 1999; Kohler, 1999). These include such known approaches as vocational intervention, paid work experience, social skills curriculum, interagency collaboration, parent involvement, and individualized planning processes (Sample, 1998). Furthermore, at a time when federal funds earmarked for special education transition programs is diminishing (Halpern, 1999), it is essential that the notion of unifying efforts with general education initiatives continue in the standards area and resulting curricula that focus on preparation for adult life. The School to Work Initiatives supported by the School to Work Opportunities Act in 1994 is a logical point of connection, reinforced by the stated purpose of the act as preparing *all* students, with or without disabilities, for work or further education after leaving high school.

Based on these identified discrepancies between what we know is necessary for an effective transition and what is actually occurring for many students in Montana, the following needs are evident in the area of secondary transition:

\#   *Strategies to gather follow-up data to assess ultimate outcomes of special education services for students with disabilities must be identified and offered to local districts to support self-assessment and school improvement planning in the area of transition.*

\#   *Technical assistance is needed to assist schools in improving transition practices as a part of their overall school improvement efforts.*

\#   *Interagency work groups must develop agreements, role clarification, and guidelines that result in a supported transition for students as they exit school to adult services and employment.*

\#   *Program guidelines need to be distributed by the Office of Public Instruction to support districts' efforts in the area of transition services.*

\#   *Collaboration with School to Work programs is necessary to increase training options for students with disabilities.*

\#   *Greater collaboration with institutions of higher education is needed to assist students with disabilities in going on to post-secondary education.*

\#   *Collaboration with IHEs is necessary to ensure that coursework is available that adequately prepares special educators in the area of secondary transition.*

Low Incidence Disabilities

Another area of need emerging from the state's self-assessment process is locally-responsive training and support in the area of low incidence disabilities (OPI, 1999b). As will be discussed in more detail in the next section of this narrative, this is an area in which training has not been readily available in Montana. As a result, there is a substantial discrepancy between current and best practices in the area of low-incidence disabilities. These students "stress" the system, particularly in small schools that may never have had a student with these needs before. Their needs often encompass positive behavioral support, assistive technology, functional curricula, related services, and familiarity with planning models that help identify meaningful ways in which these students can participate in general education activities. Whereas more populous states with more fiscal resources often have an established infrastructure for technical assistance, Montana's only such resource is the

state Deaf-Blind project. Supporting .75 FTE for service to the entire state, this project is not able to address the needs of students with other severe disabilities (e.g., autism, severe/profound mental retardation).

At this point in time, the Office of Public Instruction sends out consultants to provide support in emergency situations involving students with low incidence disabilities. However, because these individuals generally are employed by a school district, they are not available for more than cursory levels of support. Furthermore, the input from multiple disciplines may be necessary in order to develop an effective plan for a student.

While the need in this area is evident, the most effective strategy to address this need is not as clear. The distribution of these students across a large geographic expanse, coupled with limited fiscal resources, suggest that initial efforts to develop a responsive structure to address these needs must undergo pilot testing, with careful monitoring of costs, procedures, and outcomes. Recommendations for future efforts/support would then be based on data that accurately reflect the costs and efforts required to provide this level of specialized training and technical assistance.

It is evident in the area of low incidence disabilities, that:

Teachers in the field need on-site support in developing the necessary skills to deliver effective programs for students with the most severe disabilities.

Efforts to develop effective and cost-efficient approaches to support teachers in their efforts with these students must be piloted and carefully evaluated.

Students with Emotional and Behavioral Support Needs

Montana has supported a statewide project, the Montana Behavioral Initiative, to create effective, preventative schoolwide behavioral practices since 1995. This project exemplifies the benefits of a unified approach to school improvement, since this initiative brings together the concerns, personnel, and resources of general and special educators, community members and parents. Together, these individuals assess the needs in their schools and community, and develop goals and plans to address these needs. Data available to date from several of the schools involved in this initiative demonstrate the value of this approach in reducing such indicators as "hallway referrals", pupil action reports, lunch room violations, fights, use of intimidating behavior among students, profanity, sexual harassment, lunch detentions, and out of school suspensions (Bailey-Anderson, 1999). More comprehensive program-wide data are now being compiled.

Despite these gains, favorably noted by the OSEP monitoring team, state and regional CSPD councils continue to identify behavioral concerns as a top priority for inservice training (OPI, 1999b). Much of the information about positive behavioral support strategies has emerged in the professional literature in the past ten years, and many practicing special educators received their training before these strategies were well documented. Furthermore, school personnel are largely untrained in the area of functional behavioral assessment, required in the new IDEA (Gable, 1996).

In addition to these broad-based needs in the area of behavioral support, there is a second population of students, i.e., those who are identified as having emotional disturbance, that clearly "stress" local schools. Although these students often have average to above average intellectual abilities, they frequently exhibit severe academic problems (Greenbaum et al., 1998) , resulting in drop out rates as high as 55% (Wagner, 1995). It has been well established that school factors such as lack of academic and social supports, reactive teaching styles, restrictive placements and frequent placement changes contribute to poor student outcomes (e.g., Kortering & Blackorby, 1992; Munk &

Repp, 1994; Tobin et al., 1999). Conversely, results for students with emotional disturbance can be improved through interventions that are sustained, flexible, positive, collaborative, culturally appropriate, and regularly evaluated. Further, interventions should: have multiple components tailored to individual needs; build upon student and family strengths; address academic as well as social concerns; and be implemented by trained personnel (e.g., Clarke et al., 1995; Eber et al., 1997; Epstein et al., 1993; McLaughlin et al., 1994). Schools need to join forces with other mental health service providers, working collaboratively to provide the resources required to implement comprehensive supports without removing students from their school and family.

In the area of behavioral support and service to students with emotional disturbance, the following needs emerge as priorities:

Students with emotional disturbance need to be identified before discipline problems escalate, and should be provided with comprehensive interventions based on functional assessments and careful planning for transitions.

There is a need for broad-based training in the use of positive behavioral supports and functional behavior assessment strategies.

Schools need access to locally responsive technical assistance to help develop and implement positive behavioral support plans for students who exhibit challenging behavior.

Interagency collaboration initiatives that have been piloted in Montana to provide school-based mental health services need to be replicated and evaluated in other areas of the state.

1.3 Retention/Recruitment and Ongoing Professional Development

An adequate supply of well-prepared teachers and related services personnel is necessary to support quality services for students with disabilities. Current state practices, resources and challenges in the area of teacher preparation, ongoing professional development, and teacher recruitment and retention will be reviewed to provide a basis for priority needs in this area encompassed within the SIP.

Preservice Practices in Teacher Education and Early Intervention

There are two major university systems in the state: The University of Montana (UMT) and Montana State University (MSU). Both offer teacher training programs for general educators. The MSU campus in Billings (MSU-B) offers coursework in special education at the bachelor's and master's level. At the bachelor's level, the special education coursework leads to a double major (general and special education) and endorsement in special education. At the graduate level, more advanced special education coursework is available, but MSU-B has been unable to maintain sufficient enrollment to offer disability, age, or content specific areas of specialization. The UMT campus offers an endorsement in special education that can be earned at the undergraduate or graduate level. At the graduate level, special education can be an area of emphasis within a Masters of Education program but once again, graduate area specialization options are quite limited.

At the present time, a federal grant supports a graduate level training program in severe disabilities that is being implemented collaboratively between the UMT and MSU-B. A proposal to continue funding this program has been submitted, but the review process has not yet been completed. In order to verify the continued need for this type of program, a statewide survey was conducted, focusing on the directors of each of Montana's 21 special education cooperatives and special education administrators of all districts large enough to support such a position. A return rate of 67% suggests that the results have some validity. Half of the administrators noted an increasing

trend in the number of students with severe disabilities that their district serves. Ninety-eight percent of the administrators indicated that they would encourage professional development in the area of severe disabilities if specialized coursework were available within their region (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1999) as a means of improving services to these students.

In the area of early intervention, the only program available in Montana to train personnel is located at the University of Montana. Funded by a personnel preparation grant fom the U.S. Department of Education for two grant cycles, this external support is coming to an end. Although this program graduates approximately 16 students every two years, the need for trained early intervention personnel is greater than the number of graduates available. According to the Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS) records, approximately 17% of the state's Family Support Specialists (FSSs) turn over each year. The major reasons for the turnover are: relocation - e.g., spouse starts a new job in a new community or out of the state; seeking an advanced degree; and choosing to stay home with a new baby. While preschool special education teachers are certified in the same way as all special education teachers in Montana (see below), many seek additional graduate level training that is geared towards young children and families. The only university-based course work that specifically details Part C to preschool transition and young children learning issues is the early intervention program at the University of Montana.

Teacher Certification Practices

In Montana, all teachers must be certified in general education before other areas of specialization can be pursued. This represents a well established value in the state that any area of specialization must first be grounded in the basics of general education. Future general educators receive introductory information about students with disabilities in a single required course for certification. While the approach to this course varies across instructors and campuses, it frequently is organized by highlighting a different disability each week, with little time to explore the

instructional implications of the various disabilities. A recent survey conducted by the Montana Education Association (MEA, 1997) indicated that 90% of general educators with less than 5 years of experience included in this sample identified themselves as unprepared to serve students with disabilities in their classrooms. They indicated that their preservice training program was insufficient to meet their needs in this area. Another survey about the advantages and disadvantages of Montana teacher preparation programs was conducted for the Montana Certification Standards and Practices Advisory Council. The sample of 169 teachers consistently expressed the opinion that preservice preparation needed to be more practical. While most reported to receive preparation in special education, they indicated a need for more training in this area. Preparation for inclusion, special needs identification, and strategies for academic and behavioral interventions ranked high among their needs (MGT of America, 1998).

With a basic preparation in general education, special education expertise is acquired through the completion of a 19 credit sequence of classes focused on special education issues. Completion of this sequence leads to an endorsement to deal with the entire age range of students and spectrum of disabilities.

Current personnel preparation practices create the following needs in Montana:

\# ***The scope of special education coursework at the endorsement level does not adequately prepare teachers to serve students across the entire spectrum of age and disability conditions.***

\# ***General educators do not receive adequate information about students with disabilities in their preservice training.***

\#   *Given the population base upon which the two major university systems draw, it is difficult for each to offer the variety of advanced coursework necessary to support graduate level specialization as well as coursework in topics of current concern (e.g., standards based reform).*

\#   *Opportunities for personnel preparation in the area of low incidence disabilities and early intervention need to be available at the university level.*

Recruitment/Retention

Montana has always been challenged to have adequate numbers of teachers, particularly in the most rural areas of the state. This situation is exacerbated by several factors. First, the average annual teacher salary in Montana is $31,000, about $9,000 less than the national average. The starting salary for Montana teachers is between $19,000 and $22,000/year (Billings, 1999). A recent article in Education Week cited Montana as an example of a state well known for losing its teachers to other, higher paying states. Out-of-state recruiters are well represented at annual career fairs held on university campuses to link new graduates with teaching positions. Second, it is difficult for teachers trained and certified in other states to gain certification in Montana without taking a substantial amount of coursework. Reciprocity agreements with other states are not in place, due largely to the staunch beliefs about training in general education for special educators. When coupled with the low salary levels, there is a substantial disincentive for teachers trained elsewhere to return to teaching if they relocate to Montana. Additional disincentives can be found in certification language that limits credit for teaching experience obtained in other states, prior to being certified in Montana. This means that experienced educators who do become certified in this state will likely have to begin at an entry level, without recognition of their experience elsewhere.

The problems that the most rural areas in Montana have always faced in the area of recruitment are starting to be experienced in the more populated areas of the state. The state's Director of Teacher Education and Licensure recently described the results of a study of school superintendents done between December 1998 and January 1999. Fifty-nine of ninety-one respondents experienced teacher shortages in their districts the spring and summer of 1998. The problems are most severe in specialized areas such as special education, as well as the most rural areas of the state (Billings, 1999). These locations are typically not viewed as highly desirable places to relocate for new teacher graduates unless they have already established family ties to an area.

On the national level, the shortage of special education teachers has been well documented (Boe, Cook, Bobbitt & Herhanian, 1998; Smith-Davis & Billingsley, 1993). Shortages are evident in both the *quantity* of teachers available to fill funded positions, as well as the match between available teachers and the specific areas in which vacancies exist (i.e., the *quality* of teachers). Recent data suggest that nationally, a chronic shortage of about 27,000 fully certified special education teachers, as well an annual demand for about 28,000 new teacher hires in special education combine to create an extremely difficult situation (Boe, 1997 as cited in US DOE, 1998).

Within Montana, data about funded and vacant positions reported to OSEP based on information from the 1997-98 school year are summarized in Table 3 (OPI, 1999b). It is important to note that these figures, in the view of many, *seriously underrepresented* actual needs in these areas. In many situations, administrators are able to piece together coverage for positions in less-than-ideal arrangements, but in doing so, do not report a position as vacant. For monitoring and accreditation reviews, this is a preferable option. From a qualitative perspective, however, services may be less than ideal.

Table 3: Filled and Funded Vacancies for Teaching, Related Services, and Early Intervention Personnel

Position	Filled	Vacant
Special Educators	849.42	13.62
Vocational Educators	11	0.00
Psychologists	96.41	0.00
School Social Workers	14.62	0.00
Occupational Therapists	21.11	2.00
Audiologists	3.00	0.00
Physical Therapists	13.47	0.00
Counselors	5.70	0.00
Speech Pathologists	173.83	2.00
Interpreters	51.25	3.00
Early Intervention Staff	74	3.00
Family Therapists	7	0.00

In addition to shortages of special educators, districts have chronic problems in attracting related services personnel to provide services required on student IEPs. Once again, the figures in Table 3 do not clearly reflect the magnitude of need in this area. Districts piece together related service coverage, utilizing itinerant therapists with limited availability, or therapists from hospitals that actually provide service in the hospital setting, virtually guaranteeing that services are not

integrated within the educational program. This also precludes ongoing training and consultation with school staff, as well as performance evaluation in natural settings. Not surprisingly, Montana's recent OSEP monitoring identified the delivery of related services as an area of concern. The on-site team cited instances in which students are not receiving the type or intensity of service that they require because staff are not available to provide more than a consultative level of service and required services cannot be responsibly delivered by other instructional personnel (i.e., teachers, paraprofessionals).

There are clear reasons for identified shortages. In the disciplines of OT, PT, and Speech, the state has a personnel preparation program in only one of these fields - physical therapy. While a speech program was located at the University of Montana until 1988, it was discontinued as a result of budget cutbacks, eliminating the in-state supply of personnel in this discipline. In the area of OT, personnel preparation programs in Washington, Idaho and South Dakota are the closest sources of trained personnel. Unfortunately, the salary levels in Montana schools do not favorably compare with those in schools in other states, nor those in hospitals and other medical facilities. This exacerbates an already difficult situation.

In the area of Speech and Language Pathology, Montana currently has a very successful collaborative arrangement in place with the University of North Dakota at Minot. Funds are allocated to pay a student stipend to bachelor's level speech personnel working in Montana schools who are interested in pursuing graduate level work leading to advanced certification. The University has a summer-only program in place, enabling students to maintain their full time employment in Montana while completing this degree. Arrangements are also in place to enable students to receive supervision for practicum experiences in Montana, completed during the school year at their job site. As indicated in a letter of support from this program (Appendix A), this arrangement is beneficial to all parties, and will continue as part of the state's recruitment/retention efforts.

The availability of interpreters for students with hearing impairments is another ongoing challenge in Montana for the reasons already identified. The state is currently part of a collaborative group including 9 states, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center who support a distance-based learning program operated by Front Range Community College in Colorado. The expenses for this program are shared among collaborators, enabling Montana to have access to a certain number of training slots for this program. Once again, the on-site time required for training is kept to a minimum, relying strongly on distance learning approaches to enable people throughout the West to access this specialized training. To date, 22 program graduates who are all working in public schools in Montana have completed this training. A copy of the Memorandum of Understanding that currently exits for this inter-state collaborative efforts is included in Appendix B.

The OSEP Monitoring team also identified the availability of counseling services as a problem in Montana schools. Unfortunately, the team was here as Montana's managed care system for the delivery of mental health services was in its final stage of collapse. Many of the services that previously had been made available to students in schools through mental health service providers were discontinued as the program began to fold. While a new regional system is now replacing managed care, concerns continue about the availability of such supports for students with disabilities, particularly those in the most rural areas of the state where providers are scarce.

In the area of personnel supply and demand, it is evident that Montana must take steps that will increase the chances of preparing and attracting a sufficient quantity of qualified teachers and related services personnel. In this regard, there is a need to:

\#   *Consider the viability of reciprocity agreements with other states to maintain adequate numbers of teachers.*

\#   *Consider changes in certification language that limit credit for teaching experience from*

other states as one means of increasing starting pay for special educators who relocate to

Montana.

\# *Expand collaborative relationships with related services training programs in other states,*

utilizing a variety of incentive strategies for new graduates to take positions in Montana.

Professional Development

In 1996, the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future published a report designed to serve as a blueprint for preparing and supporting excellent teachers in all of this country's schools. This report is reinforced by the voices of many others who advocate for a better prepared teaching force as a key component in current reform efforts (e.g., Blanton et al., 1997; Cruickshank, 1996). As stated in this report (National Commission, 1996), "What teachers know and can do is the most important influence on what students learn" (pg. vi). This premise is supported by a large body of research, including a study of over 1,000 districts in which results indicated that every additional dollar spent on more highly qualified teachers netted greater improvements in student achievement than did any other use of school resources (Ferguson, 1991).

In 1997, Montana signed on to implement the recommendations of the National Commission on Teaching and American's Future (1996), a report that calls for the overhauling of teacher education and teaching as a profession. With the lack of financial commitment from the legislature, it is unclear how this agenda will be supported. The Montana Education Association has formed an alliance with other state education groups to start a private endowment that will pay for professional development initiatives. The governor's education agenda also includes creating incentives for teachers to earn certification from the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards. As of last year at this time, Montana did not have a single nationally certified teacher. A recent study by the Thomas Fordham Foundation gave Montana a failing grade for its efforts to improve the quality of teachers (Anez, 1999c). This ranking reflects the lack of state control in areas of teacher

recruitment, as well as an absence of a system of rewards or sanctions based on student performance. In Montana, the state Constitution gives local school boards the power to supervise and control their schools. As a result, Montana typically fares poorly on national school reform performance comparisons on many dimensions, due to its strong reliance upon local control to ensure quality.

It is clear that teachers today face challenges not imagined by their professional predecessors. Today's classrooms are no longer homogeneous groups of students who, by virtue of being the same age, can be seen as having the same learning needs, styles, previous school experience, and entry skills. The increase in the number of students with identified disabilities in general education classrooms merely increases the diversity in already heterogeneous groups of students. The ability to deliver instruction in a way that capitalizes upon different ways of learning is essential if excellence is to be achieved by *all*. As described by Darling-Hammond (1993), "The view that underpins the new paradigm for school reform starts from the assumption that students are not standardized and that teaching is not routine" (pg. 757).

Within the area of special education, CSPD in Montana is a vital and critical structure that coordinates professional development supported with special education Part D dollars (Fishbaugh et al., 1995). Montana's structure is based on the establishment of Regional CSPD teams in each of the five regions of the state. Within each region, a council that is made up of diverse stakeholders conducts formal and informal assessments of regional needs, and utilizes funds allocated through Part D dollars to support activities that meet identified regional needs. A State Council, consisting of diverse stakeholders (see membership in Appendix H) serves as the umbrella structure to engage in state level planning, disseminate information to the regions, and deal with issues of statewide concern. As was described in the development of state standards, much is accomplished in Montana through voluntary, collaborative relationships. At this point in time, individual regions are at the point where the work load associated with disseminating information and planning activities to

address regional needs is becoming unmanageable. Regions are requesting additional resources to better support the administrative, clerical, and management aspects of their work.

The other available mechanism to stimulate the ongoing professional development of teachers in the field is the continuing education requirements for recertification. At this point in time, lack of specificity in Montana's requirements to maintain certification has also been identified as an issue in promoting planned sequences of professional development. Requirements specify the number of credits and continuing education units required to maintain certification, but does not establish parameters about content areas that represent a meaningful sequence of continued learning within one's field (OPI, 1999c). This leaves teachers free to pursue any area of interest, regardless of the connection to improvement within their professional capacity.

In the area of early intervention, Child and Family Services Programs employ Family Support Specialists (FSS). As the lead agency in the area of early intervention, the DPHHS is responsible for certification of these personnel. FSS go through a two step certification process that must be completed within a two year period during which the individual is employed. Based on their work in their job, the Family Support Specialist builds a portfolio demonstrating competence in 220 items in 10 categories. Since not all Family Support Specialists have gone through the University of Montana's early intervention program, many Family Support Specialists need training in particular areas covered in the courses, in order to complete their certification. Departmental records indicate that up to 20% of the FSSs going through the certification process ask for an extension of up to one year to take university coursework in areas corresponding to their professional preparation deficiencies (Spiegle-Stinger, 1999). A review of data from the last four certification reviews indicates the following areas frequently emerge as weaknesses among certification candidates: (1) skills for successful behavior interventions; (2) mediation training; (3) skills and techniques to ease transitions for toddlers; (4) conflict management skills; (5) knowledge of procedural safeguards; and

(6) skills to develop capacity among families to advocate for their needs. It is evident that ongoing professional development is critical to address areas of identified weakness among personnel working within Child and Family Services Programs in the state.

In order to support Montana teachers to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse and challenging student population, there is a need for:

\#   ***Additional sources of funding to support professional development initiatives.***

\#   ***Collaborative partnerships with the state's teacher training programs to develop and make available a broader array of graduate level coursework to support planned programs of professional development for teachers in the field.***

\#   ***Collaborative partnerships with the state's teacher training programs to develop and make available training for general educators that focuses on teaching methods proven to effectively support the learning of students with diverse abilities, styles, and needs.***

\#   ***Resources earmarked to establish a more stable infrastructure for the regional CSPD structure in Montana to address statewide, as well as regionally-specific personnel development needs.***

2.0 Significance

At a time when accountability has become one of the most frequently used words in our educational vocabulary, it is appropriate that a project's significance be assessed relative to the likelihood that systemic change or improvement will actually occur as a result of project activities. Fullan (1991), discussing the construct and complexity of change in education, writes "*How can it be that so much school reform has taken place over the last century yet schooling appears pretty much the same as it's always been* (pg. 29)? Other scholars of educational reform have offered similar assessments about the effectiveness of reform efforts. Cuban (1988), for example, observed "*The ingredients change, the Chinese saying goes, but the soup remains the same*" (p.343). Eight years

later, however, he disputes the myth that schools don't change, writing "*Such a myth is not only mistaken, but is also the basis for the profound pessimism that presently exists over the capacity of public schools to improve. The fact is that over the last century, there have been many organizational, governance, curricular, and even instructional changes in public schools. Such changes have been adopted, adapted, implemented and institutionalized* (Cuban, 1996, p. 75)."

2.1 Educational Change Principles Inform Project Practice

The reality is that much *has* been learned about what is necessary to create change in our schools as a result of both successful and unsuccessful efforts. Hargreaves (1997) recently summarized over a decade of study of educational change. Based on this rich body of literature, he identified nine circumstances that contribute to the failure of educational change. As the SIP was being developed, these factors, delineated in Table 4, served as a valuable benchmark in critically evaluating the integrity and comprehensiveness of project plans and procedures.

Table 4: Hargreaves (1997) Synthesis of the Change Literature

Why Change Does Not Succeed[1]
Rationale. The reason for the change is poorly conceptualized or not clearly demonstrated. It is not obvious who will benefit and how. What the change will achieve for students in particular is not spelled out
Scope. The change is too broad and ambitious so that teachers have to work on too many fronts, or it is too limited and specific so that little real change occurs at all.
Pace. The change is too fast for people to cope with, or too slow so that they become impatient or bored and move on to something else.

34

Why Change Does Not Succeed[1]
Resources. The change is poorly resourced or resources are withdrawn once the first flush of innovation is over. There is not enough money for materials or time for teachers to plan. The change is built on the back of teachers, who cannot bear it for long without additional support.
Commitment. There is no long-term commitment to the change to carry people through the anxiety, frustration, and despair of early experimentation and unavoidable setbacks.
Key Staff. Key staff who can contribute to the change, or might be affected by it, are not committed. Conversely, key staff might be over-involved as an administrative elite, from which other teachers feel excluded. Resistance and resentment are the consequences in either case.
Parents. Parents opposed the change because they are kept at a distance from it. Professionals can collaborate so enthusiastically among themselves that they involve the community too little or too late, and lose a vital form of support on which successful schoolwide change depends.
Leadership. Leaders are either too controlling, too ineffectual, or cash in on the early success of the innovation to move on to higher things.
Relationship to Other Initiatives. The change is pursued in isolation and gets undermined by other unchanged structures. Conversely, the change may be poorly coordinated with and engulfed by a tidal wave of parallel changes that make it hard for teachers to focus their effort.

[1]Hargreaves (1997a), pp. viii.

In addition to these considerations, it is helpful to be clear about the intended scope of change to accurately assess project impact and success. Not every action that is part of the SIP requires

systemic change. Cuban (1996) offers the terminology *incremental* and *fundamental* to assist in making this distinction. Incremental changes are innovations that improve the efficiency and effectiveness of existing structures. Fundamental changes alter the very structure or organization of a system, representing what most people think about when using the term "systems change".

As will be detailed in the next section of this proposal, the work scope of Montana's State Improvement Plan encompasses both incremental and fundamental changes. Where workable structures are in place but at the present time, need to be better resourced or function in a slightly different way, project goals and anticipated outcomes represent incremental changes in the system. In the area of inservice training, for example, Montana's CSPD structure has been nationally recognized for its broad-based involvement of key stakeholder groups (Fishbaugh et al., 1995; feedback of OSEP monitoring team, 1999). However, additional support is necessary in order to enable this structure to operate more efficiently. On the other hand, integrating the efforts of categorical federal programs that comprise Montana's school reform initiative will result in a qualitatively different infrastructure, representing a fundamental change in this system. Furthermore, this change is substantial and significant since it is not restricted to practice within the special education system.

In Table 5, key features of the approach to project implementation, addressed in more detail in the next section, are highlighted for the three project goals. This information is provided to illustrate the planful thinking and proactive steps that will be taken to increase the likelihood that this project will result in meaningful change and improvement.

Table 5: Strategic Planning Strategies to Maximize the Likelihood of Systemic Change and Improvement in Montana

Key Strategies to Facilitate Change
Goal 1.0 - Standards-Based Reform: Change is NOT being pursued in isolation. Rather, key staff from the SEA with the knowledge and responsibility for the multiple federal initiatives focused on school improvement and student achievement are collaborating partners in this project, integrating their efforts to design systems and approaches that address the needs of *all* students, including those with disabilities. Professionals from the field are actively involved in efforts to translate standards and assessment policy into clear guidelines and support at the implementation level. Concurrent efforts that involve and inform parents are planned. The reason for change is clearly understood and articulated.
Goal 2.0 - Outcomes for Students with Disabilities: Broad-based input and data from multiple sources have been used to identify priority areas for targeted improvement, creating a strong base of support and commitment. Efforts are initially focused on the most critical areas of concern, to maintain a scope of work that is doable. Efforts are focused on pooling the resources of multiple agencies to support necessary services.   Parents are critical partners in advocating for and improving outcomes for their children.
Goal 3.0 Retention/Recruitment: There is a consensus among key stakeholders that the identified focus of initiatives in this area are critical to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. Key individuals from the various entities critical to success in this area have committed to collaborative partnerships. Problems are being addressed on a variety of fronts in order to maximize the chances of success, because many factors contributing to personnel challenges are difficult to predict and control.

2.2 Project Results in Systemic Change and Improvement

Within the three initiative areas of this project, the specific areas of systems change or improvement that are anticipated are identified below. For the state of Montana, these outcomes represent substantial and significant accomplishments on the road toward improved outcomes for *all* students.

Standards-Based Reform

<   Creation of a unified management information system that will eliminate duplication of information requests across special education, Title I, and vocational education.

<   Students with disabilities will be included in the state systems of standards and accountability.

<   Students with disabilities will be encompassed within schoolwide improvement initiatives.

Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

<   Interagency collaboration and resource sharing that support valued transition outcomes for students with disabilities.

<   Interagency collaboration and resource sharing to support the mental health support needs of students with disabilities through school-based service models.

<   The creation of a Low Incidence Support Team to provide on-site training and consultation.

<   Strengthen the infrastructure supporting the Regional network of CSPD Councils to provide ongoing regionally-responsive professional development.

Personnel Retention/Recruitment and Professional Development

<   More varied opportunities for specialization and ongoing professional development will be available to general and special education teachers throughout the state through the collaborative efforts of OPI and the state's IHEs.

<   Collaborative cross-state partnerships will reduce personnel needs in related services fields.

38

<   Interagency collaboration will create options for preservice and professional development for those working within the field of early intervention.

3.0 Quality of Project Design

The quality of design for this project will be demonstrated by reviewing the following: (a) project goals, objectives, and intended outcomes; (b) the match between state needs and the design of the SIP; (c) the training and professional development initiatives that will support project outcomes; (d) the research and practice literature that inform project initiatives; (e) linkages and partnerships that will be utilized to accomplish project goals; and (f) the relationship between project outcomes and standards-based reform.

3.1 Project Goals, Objectives and Outcomes

The work scope of the project has been organized around goals in the areas of (1) standards-based reform; (2) improved outcomes for students with disabilities; and (3) personnel retention, recruitment and professional development. For each area, measurable objectives and anticipated outcomes are identified.

Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel and policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.

Objectives for Goal 1	Outcomes for Goal 1

Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel and policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.	
1.1 Use multiple methods to assist educators in aligning local curricula and instructional practices to state standards, demonstrating their applicability to the learning needs of students with identified disabilities.	Written guidelines and professional development activities focused on the link between standards and curricula, detailing the involvement of students with disabilities in this reform.
1.2 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are being addressed in school improvement initiatives.	Technical assistance to schools involved in comprehensive reform; dissemination of information about successful local practices.
1.3 Clarify requirements and improve current levels of practice regarding the involvement of students with disabilities in statewide assessments.	Written guidelines and professional development activities focused on statewide assessment requirements, detailing the involvement of students with disabilities in this reform and necessity of providing accommodations.
1.4 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to ensure that students with disabilities are involved in statewide assessment systems.	Technical assistance to schools involved in comprehensive reform; dissemination of information about successful local practices.

Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel and policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.	
1.5 Establish clear expectations for improved achievement for students with disabilities relative to the general education curriculum.	Clear performance goals for students with disabilities that reflect improvement over baseline levels of curricular involvement.
1.6 Develop an integrated management information system that brings together data collected by general education, special education, and vocational education divisions of the Office of Public Instruction.	One data system at the SEA level that all Divisions can access; examples of integrated systems at the local level that can be broadly shared.
1.7 Link monitoring practices to the school improvement process, supporting LEAs in their efforts to use accountability data to evaluate school performance and identify areas in need of improvement.	Phased-in implementation of an improvement-based model of LEA monitoring, informed by school level performance data.
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.	

Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Objectives for Goal 2	Outcomes for Goal 2
2.1 Coordinate information dissemination, technical assistance, and training efforts to focus on improved transition planning for students with disabilities.	Improved quality of transition plans; creation of follow-up mechanism to document post-school outcomes.
2.2 Support interagency collaboration at the state and local level to make available necessary services and supports for students with disabilities and their families.	Consistent involvement of adult service providers in the transition planning process; decrease in drop-out rates for students with disabilities; increase in post-school employment and education.
2.3 Support the replication and refinement of a collaborative model to deliver school-based mental health services to students with emotional support needs.	Models will be developed in 2-3 LEAs with diverse characteristics and resources each year; dissemination of information about approaches; increase in # of students receiving school-based support services.

Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

2.4 Investigate the fiscal and programmatic feasibility of a Low Incidence Support Team (LIST) to provide on-site technical assistance and training in dealing with the unique needs of students who "stress" the system.	Pilot of LIST in two regions; complete fiscal and programmatic cost-benefit analysis; leverage this information to secure additional funding support for expansion of successful practices.
2.5 Strengthen the infrastructure of the regional CSPD Councils, supporting them in their efforts to identify and respond to priority professional development needs within their regions.	An administrative structure (secretarial support and management support) within each of the 5 CSPD regions; increased opportunities for professional development in each region.

Goal 3: Personnel Retention/Recruitment and Professional Development. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

Objectives for Goal 3	Outcomes for Goal 3
3.1 Implement collaborative agreements with personnel preparation programs in other states to alleviate shortages in the areas of related services and educational interpreters.	Decrease in personnel shortages in the areas of speech, OT, & Educational Interpreting.

Goal 3: Personnel Retention/Recruitment and Professional Development. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

Objectives for Goal 3	Outcomes for Goal 3
3.2 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to increase opportunities for a planned course of graduate study that furthers professional development and lifelong learning for teachers.	Offer 2-3 graduate level courses each year that address issues aligned with improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
3.3 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide new mechanisms and approaches to increase the ability of general educators to respond to the needs of students with disabilities.	Offer 2-3 graduate level courses each year that address issues aligned with improved outcomes for students with disabilities.
3.4 Address barriers to the recruitment of special education teachers through changes in certification requirements.	Establish working group consisting of Teacher Certification personnel and representatives of IHEs to make recommendations for policy changes.
3.5 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide preservice training and ongoing professional development for personnel who work within the early intervention system.	Continuation of preservice training in the areas of early intervention and low incidence disabilities.

3.2 Appropriateness of Project Design

This project has been designed to address improvement in student outcomes by focusing on initiatives that involve and impact all levels of the system, from the state, to the region, to the district, to the individual student. At the outset of this project, this creates a structure that promotes a bi-directional flow of information, such that information and feedback from multiple levels of the system can be used to guide actions taken at each individual level. A different set of layers are also evident when an initiative is analyzed in terms of its implementation components. Key activities targeted for this project have associated activities at the policy, training, information dissemination, implementation and evaluation levels. As suggested by the change literature (see previous section), effort focused on each of these levels and stakeholder groups maximizes the likelihood of successful outcomes.

Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between the levels of implementation of project initiatives, the populations that will be involved in and impacted by project activities, and the three major initiative areas. Initiatives designed to address each level of the systems have been identified based on an extensive analysis of needs in Montana. At the state level, the unification of special education program improvement within the context of statewide school reform is the most necessary and logical means of working toward equitable educational outcomes for *all* students. Concurrent effort must be focused on policy, training, information dissemination, school level implementation, and evaluation to achieve meaningful outcomes in this critical area. Needs assessment data, including recent OSEP monitoring, also led to the identification of priority areas in which focused efforts are necessary to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. These areas include: transition from school to adult life; support for personnel working with students with low incidence disabilities, students with emotional disturbance and/or challenging behavior; and support for personnel working with young children in the early intervention system in Montana. Finally, the

provision of quality services is dependent upon sufficient, well trained personnel. Needs assessment data for Montana indicate current shortages of related services personnel and projected increased shortages for special educators. Further, professional development initiatives are necessary to support changes in previously identified areas of need.

FIGURE 1.

Montana State Improvement Plan

Illustration of Relationship Between Goals, Levels of Implementation, and Implementation Components
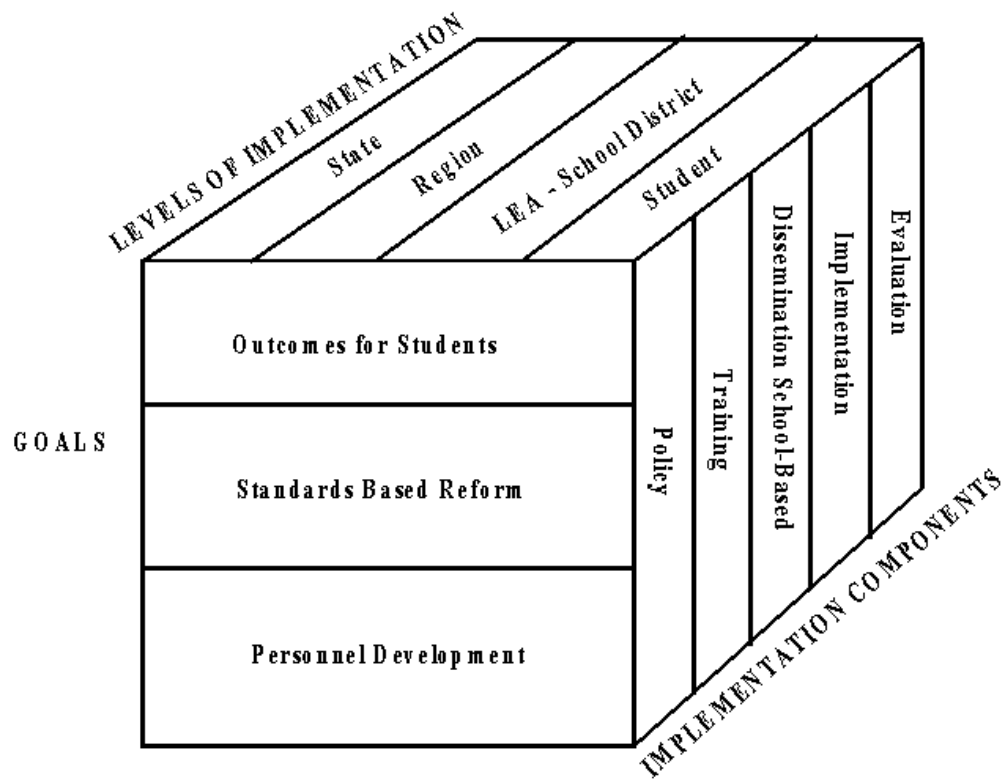
3.3 Sustained Program of Training in the Field

All of the initiatives encompassed within Goal 3 of the SIP address the area of training. Furthermore, as discussed in the previous section and illustrated in Figure 1, there are training components to both of the other project goals.

Several qualities of the program design contribute to a coherent and sustained agenda in this area. First, the training agenda detailed in the SIP includes efforts originating at various levels of the system, i.e., higher education, the state's CSPD, and school-directed professional development initiatives. While the potential exists for extreme fragmentation under these circumstances, these efforts will be coordinated through existing collaborative structures such as CSPD and the Special Education Advisory Council that bring together the diverse stakeholder groups that are involved in the lives of individuals with disabilities of all ages (i.e., CSPD). Table 6 delineates the stakeholder groups that are represented in each of these two key state level groups. In addition, new alliances will be developed as a result of the SIP (e.g., partnership agreements between universities and the SEA; intragency teaming within OPI) to align the efforts of entities involved in professional development that, at this point in time, operate independently and/or engage in less formal forms of collaboration. Third, there are planned activities to address the needs of personnel serving students in preschool and early intervention programs, as well as general and special education personnel serving students between the ages of 6 and 21. Finally, interagency collaboration with organizations that provide services to students after they leave the school system promotes continuity in professional development for personnel who provide services beyond the age of 21. Collectively, these structures and practices will result in a coherent, sustained program of training in the field.

Table 6: Stakeholder Groups Participating in State Level Advisory Committees

Stakeholder Group	State CSPD Council	Special Ed Advisory Panel
general education teachers	Y	Y
special education teachers	Y	Y
administrators	Y	Y
parents	Y	Y
paraeducators	Y	
special education cooperatives	Y	
IHEs	Y	Y
Regional CSPD chairs	Y	
state agency personnel	Y	Y
private school representative	Y	Y
legislator		Y
business community		Y
juvenile & adult corrections		Y
teacher union	Y	
adult service providers	Y	
MT Speech & Hearing Assoc.	Y	

Stakeholder Group	State CSPD Council	Special Ed Advisory Panel
school boards	Y	
school psychologists	Y	
Part C	Y	

A final means of examining the comprehensiveness of the program of training supported by the SIP is to review the multiple training initiatives that will be supported. They are as follows:

< Preservice training for personnel who work in early intervention programs;

< Ongoing professional development for personnel who work in early intervention programs;

< Expanded graduate level training for special and general educators, focused on best practices to support the learning needs of all students within general education classrooms, standards-based reform, and new statewide assessment requirements;

< Expanded graduate level training for special educators in areas of identified need within the state: transition, behavioral support, low incidence disabilities;

< Partnerships within the context of existing professional development initiatives supported by OPI (e.g., Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration, school-wide Title I programs, CSPD);

< Utilization of CSPD network as a means of providing professional development at the regional/school level in the area of performance standards and alternative assessment;

< Professional development fostered through on-site technical assistance for students who "stress" the system;

< Collaboration with out-of-state training programs to train personnel in areas of identified

shortage (e.g., SLP, OT, educational interpreters); and

< Professional development activities focused on improved transition practices, focused on multi-agency collaboration and participation.

3.4 Project Design Based on Research and Effective Practice

From a design perspective, the grounding of this project in the knowledge base of systems change has already been described (see Section 2.0). The project's foundation in knowledge and practice that is professionally credible and associated with demonstrated effectiveness for students with disabilities is now briefly reviewed. OSEP's five strategic directions, i.e., "what works" for students with disabilities, provides an efficient organizing framework within which the SIP's project design can be considered (OSEP, nd). Decision-making about project priorities are discussed within these five areas.

1. Infants, Toddler and Their Families Receive the Supports They Need. During the recent OSEP monitoring, the services of Montana's Part C program received highly favorable marks. The key to sustaining quality in this system is to maintain a cadre of well-trained personnel to serve young children and their families. The SIP encompasses an initiative to support a preservice training program with a well-established track record of success that has previously relied upon discretionary federal funding in the area of personnel preparation. This support will also ensure the availability of ongoing professional development opportunities for personnel already working within the system. Close collaboration between the UMT faculty member who provides this training, the SEA, and the state's Part C coordinator ensures that professional development is focused on areas of weakness identified through an annual review of professional portfolios for the purpose of Family Support Specialist Part C IDEA certification.

2. Preschool Programs Prepare Children with Disabilities for Elementary School Success. The

early childhood special education research clearly reports the importance of establishing an early learning foundation for young children in order to be prepared for an elementary education. As previously noted, special education teachers in Montana are not required to have specific training in early childhood special education in order to teach or consult in preschool programs. This has created some problems. Families have reported that they have not been treated as a team member in IEP and other school processes. Further, the recent monitoring of 619 preschool services indicated that transition from Part C to Part B (IDEA) services appears to be an area requiring improvement. The early intervention program referenced in the previous section provides course work in key areas of early childhood special education, including transition services. Special education teachers will be able to access early childhood special education training through distance education classes.

3. <u>Effective Intervention is Critical for Young Students with Reading or Behavioral Difficulties</u>. There is substantial evidence that many students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance are not identified until several years into their elementary school years, after substantial deficits in reading have already occurred. These academic problems, in turn, often lead to behavioral difficulty (Greenbaum et al., 1998). In the long term, these children are at high risk of academic failure, dropping out of school, and becoming serious discipline problems (e.g., Tobin & Sugai, 1999). This SIP is addressing this problem on multiple fronts. First, the standards based reform movement in Montana is the umbrella under which high standards, statewide assessment, and school accountability are brought together (see following discussion for point #4). Collaborative efforts between special and general educators within these activities will result in more educationally responsive classrooms, in which problems such as these will be addressed in a more proactive manner. Further, professional development initiatives focused on increasing the training provided to general

educators at the preservice and professional development level will better prepare teachers to identify and refer such problems for evaluation at an earlier age, providing more opportunity for effective intervention to occur. Similarly, initiatives to integrate school-based mental health services into programs as a means of providing necessary support without disrupting academic opportunities is a component of the SIP. Finally, training initiatives focused on parents will increase their awareness of standards and benchmarks expected at different ages throughout their child's school years. This may assist them in identifying learning difficulties earlier.

4.   Appropriate Access to the General Education Curriculum. Perhaps the most valuable outcome of involving special education personnel in establishing and articulating state standards and assessment requirements is to bridge the separation that has developed between what is taught and expected of students with and without disabilities. A growing body of research suggests that inclusive programming improves the academic performance of students with disabilities and promotes ongoing access to the general education curriculum (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). However, instructional practices that support diverse learners must be utilized in general education classrooms in order for these gains to be realized. Montana's SIP addresses this issue through the collaborative efforts surrounding the state's standards-based reform initiative, as well as through other professional development, technical assistance, and preservice training activities. Collaborative agreements with the state's IHEs create new opportunities for preservice and graduate level training in these content areas. The CSPD network will provide a vehicle through which regionally responsive training and technical assistance in this priority area will be delivered. School-specific initiatives will be undertaken to provide demonstration sites that can, in turn, serve as a source of information and mentoring for other schools.

5. <u>All Students with Disabilities Complete High School</u>. Collaboration is essential to provide the educational experiences that will lead to high school completion and a smooth transition to work or post-secondary education. This is an area that requires substantial improvement in Montana. Based on substantial research and outcomes of model demonstration programs (Wehman, 1992), it is known that more varied and responsive secondary experiences coupled with better planning and preparation for what comes after school are critical components for better outcomes. In the SIP, closer ties to the Division of Career, Vocational and Adult Services within OPI will focus on making sure that exiting program options are available to students with disabilities, and that the necessary supports are in place to promote success. Further, new curricular offerings tied to secondary school improvement initiative and programs developed with School-to-Work dollars should increase options available to students with disabilities. Continued efforts of the state's two Transition Technical Assistance Centers will focus on creating the interagency linkages and agreements that are critical to making sure that secondary school experiences are focused on desired post-school goals, as well as supporting school level initiatives through technical assistance and training efforts.

3.5 Project Linkages with Agencies and Organizations

In a state like Montana, where resources are very scarce, it is not difficult to know who is involved in providing services that impact young children and students with disabilities and their families. There is also a pervasive culture of collaboration, simply because it makes sense. The letters of support and partnership agreements included in Appendix A attest to the linkages that are already in place (this is a well established practice in Montana), as well as those that will become more formalized as a result of this project. Linkages with organizations that are collaborators in the implementation of the SIP can be organized in several categories.

1. <u>Intra-agency Partnerships</u> - Includes formal partnerships with the Division of School Improvement, Division of Educational Opportunity and Equity Programs, Division of Career, Vocational, and Adult Services, Division of Measurement and Accountability, and Division of Health Enhancement and Safety, all within the Office of Public Instruction. These are the organizational units involved with other federal programs tied to school improvement and accountability.

2. <u>Interagency Partnerships</u> - Includes ongoing partnerships with various divisions of the Department of Public Health and Human Services, the state's agency housing social, health, and rehabilitative service programs. Specific partnerships are in place with the Disability Services Division (includes Part C), Addictive and Mental Disorders Division, Child and Family Services Division, and the Vocational Rehabilitation Division.

3. <u>Partnerships with LEAs</u> - Through the School Improvement Initiatives, partnerships are in place with the various LEAs that are receiving funding through the Title I program. Other initiatives such as the Montana Behavior Initiatives encompasses efforts in LEAs statewide.

4. <u>Partnerships with Parents</u> - Parents Let's Unite for Kids, Montana's Parent Training and Information Center, is a partner with OPI in many of its initiatives, and is a contractual

partner for the SIP. The state PTA has also committed to support this effort.

5. Partnerships with Institutions of Higher Education - Agreements are in place for preservice and professional development initiatives to be undertaken by MSU-Billings and the University of Montana. In addition, a partnership agreement is in place with OPI and Montana's University Affiliated Rural Institute on Disabilities at the University of Montana. Agreements are also in place with out-of-state institutions of higher education to train personnel in the area of related services (University of North Dakota, Front Range Community College, Eastern Washington University).

6. Partnerships with Professional Organizations - Discipline-specific organizations, such as the Montana Association of School Psychologists, School Administrators of Montana, Montana School OT/PT Organization, have expressed their support of the state's efforts for improvement.

7. Partnerships with Teacher Unions - The Montana Federation of Teachers and the Montana Education Association has pledged their support for the SIP.

3.6 Relationship of Project to Standards-Based Reform

As described in great detail in the need section of this proposal, a major focus of Montana's SIP is to integrate the efforts of special educators with other federally funded initiatives focused on school improvement in Montana. Thus, the first goal and all of its associated objectives encompass activities to help translate this information so that educators understand how standards and assessment applies to all students, work collaboratively to provide technical assistance and professional development to improve practice in the field in these areas, and integrate management information systems so that accountability for students with disabilities becomes a part of school-wide accountability systems and considerations. In an effort to minimize redundancy, the reader is referred back to the need section of this proposal (Section 1.1 - Standards Based Reform in Montana)

and the associated goals and objectives established in this area in Section 3 (Section 3.1 - Project Goals, Objectives, and Outcomes).

4.0 Project Personnel

In this section, project employment practices will be reviewed, followed by an identification of project personnel and their qualifications from the applicant agency, as well as its collaborating partners.

Table 7: Equal Employment Opportunity Policy of Montana's Office of Public Instruction

It is the policy of the OPI to provide equal employment opportunity to all individuals. The OPI does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, handicap, marital status, or political belief with the exception of special programs provided by law.

The OPI will take affirmative action to equalize employment opportunities at all levels of agency operations where there is evidence that there have been barriers to employment for those classes of people who have traditionally been denied equal employment opportunity.

The OPI is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to any known disability that may interfere with a disabled applicant's ability to compete in the selection process or a disabled employee's ability to perform the duties of a job.

The OPI will not retaliate against any employee for lawfully opposing any discriminatory practice, including the filing of an internal grievance, the filing of a union grievance, the initiation of an external administrative or legal proceeding or testifying in or participating in any of the above.

It is the policy of the OPI to provide equal employment opportunity to all individuals. The OPI does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, handicap, marital status, or political belief with the exception of special programs provided by law.

The OPI will take affirmative action to equalize employment opportunities at all levels of agency operations where there is evidence that there have been barriers to employment for those classes of people who have traditionally been denied equal employment opportunity.

The OPI is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to any known disability that may interfere with a disabled applicant's ability to compete in the selection process or a disabled employee's ability to perform the duties of a job.

The OPI will not retaliate against any employee for lawfully opposing any discriminatory practice, including the filing of an internal grievance, the filing of a union grievance, the initiation of an external administrative or legal proceeding or testifying in or participating in any of the above.

The designated EEO Officer for the OPI is the personnel officer. The personnel officer attempts to resolve complaints of discrimination. The personnel officer is also responsible for implementation of measures designed to remediate the effects of demonstrable past discrimination within the OPI.

The OPI cooperates with the State of Montana Personnel Division in determining appropriate affirmative action plan items. A statement assigning responsibility for coordinating the agency affirmative action program and for attempting to resolve employee EEO complaints to a designated EEO officer and assigning responsibility for implementing the affirmative action program to all agency managers and supervisors shall be posted in each work location.

4.1 Nondiscriminatory Employment Practices

The state's Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Program was established through a Governor's executive order. The Department of Administration works with each state agency to implement and maintain an effective EEO program throughout state government. The complete policy of the Office of Public Instruction related to Equal Employment Opportunity is provided in Table 7. For the purposes of this grant, these procedures will guide the recruitment and hiring of the Coordinator position for which a current employee is not available. In addition, nondiscriminatory hiring practices are required of all subcontractors to OPI.

4.2 Qualifications of Key Personnel

With one exception, key personnel for this project are currently employed by the State of Montana, holding leadership positions within various divisions of the Office of Public Instruction.. Abbreviated vitae for all key personnel are contained in Appendix C.

The principal investigator for this project, <u>Mr. Robert Runkel</u>, has been state director of special education in Montana since 1987. As state director, he has overall responsibility for the delivery of special education to approximately 18,000 young children and students with identified disabilities, as well as budget responsibility for approximately $33 million dollars of State General Funds and over $11 million dollars of federal funding under IDEA. As current secretary/treasurer of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Mr. Runkel is an active and well respected state director. With a keen understanding of both the needs of Montana, as well as national trends, he is well respected for his ability to work collaboratively to design solutions to Montana's service delivery challenges that are well suited to the individual character of this state. From his strong position of leadership in the state, his oversight and vision for this project will be critical to its success. Grant funds will support .05 FTE for Mr. Runkel. He will actually devote far more effort to this project, but his time is already supported by the SEA.

Susan Bailey-Anderson will serve as Project Director, devoting .50 FTE to this project. Her other existing responsibilities, including Montana's CSPD, member of the Teacher-Education Standards Review Committee, and organizer of statewide compliance monitoring teams, are a natural fit with this project, and will assist in the integration of efforts across initiatives. She has worked within OPI since 1987. Like Mr. Runkel, her familiarity with all aspects of special education services in the state is unmatched. Further, they are both held in extremely high regard by practitioners across the state. It is these positive relationships that contribute to the high levels of voluntary collaboration that characterizes much of how things are accomplished within this state.

Dr.Linda Vrooman Peterson is Administrator of the Division of School Improvement at OPI. In this capacity, she serves as the Director of the Montana Standards Revision Project. The School Improvement Division includes the Technology Literacy Challenge Funds Grant Program, Professional Development Program, Curriculum and Instructional Assessment, Middle School Review, Montana Improving Schools Through Accreditation Program, and Standards Implementation. In addition, Dr. Peterson currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Montana Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, and as a member of the School Improvement Advisory Committee of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. For the purposes of this project, she will serve as a member of the Project Management Team, taking the lead in initiatives focused on translating information about Montana standards through professional development and information dissemination activities, with a particular focus on communicating how standards apply to *all* students. This grant will fund .05 of Dr. Peterson's FTE to support her cross-divisional efforts and membership on the OPI Management Team.

Dr. Dori Nielson is Administrator of the Division of Measurement and Accountability at OPI. Ms. Nielson oversees the design and preparation of the Montana Statewide Education Profile and other major data-based reports about Montana schools and their services. With a background in

teaching, administration, and educational leadership, Dr. Nielson has a valuable mix of experiences that enable her to work effectively at the state level, yet understanding implementation issues at the district and school levels. She will assume leadership in the project initiative focused on integrating the currently separate data management systems of Title I, Vocational Education, and Special Education, and will also chair the project Evaluation Committee. In order to support these substantial efforts, project funds will fund .25 of her FTE.

B.J. Granbery is Administrator of the Division of Educational Opportunity and Equity Programs. She is also the State Director of the ESEA Title I program. In addition to Title I, this Division encompasses ESEA Titles II and VI, Migrant Education Program, Even Start Family Literacy, Title VII Bilingual Programs, Homeless Children and Youth Program, Emergency Immigrant Program, Indian Education, Learn and Serve Programs, and America Reads. Ms. Granbery served a three year term as secretary of the Board of Directors of the National Association of State Title I Directors and will begin a two year term as treasurer in January, 2000. She also served a one year term on the Advisory Council to the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Comprehensive Center and is currently serving on the Montana Steering Committee for America Reads. Within OPI, Ms. Granbery serves on the School Improvement Executive Team, the Program Coordinating Committee, and the Comprehensive School Reform Team. This grant will fund .05 of Ms. Granbery's FTE to support her involvement in cross-divisional collaboration efforts and membership on the OPI Management Team.

Spencer Sartorius is Administrator of the Division of Health Enhancement and Safety at OPI. In this position, he is responsible for administering the comprehensive health education programs (i.e., Health, Physical Education, HIV/STD Education, Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, Guidance and Counseling, Child/Sexual Abuse, Traffic/Driver Education, Motorcycle Safety, School Food Services, and Nutrition Education and Training). He oversees the delivery of

technical assistance to schools in these many areas, and develops teacher training standards and student performance standards in the areas encompassed by this division. His involvement in this grant will be particularly critical in initiatives to deal with challenging behavior, reduce drop-out rates, and provide guidance and counseling services to students with disabilities. This grant will support .05 of his FTE to defray some of the costs of his involvement in cross-divisional collaboration efforts and membership of the OPI Management Team.

Dr. Jody Messinger is Administrator of the Division of Career, Vocational, and Adult Services at OPI. In this position, Dr. Messinger provides leadership and supervision in the areas of Career and Technical Education, School-to-Work, Adult Basic Education, Veterans Education, and General Education Development (GED) Programs. Her involvement in this project will be especially critical in initiatives focused on improving transition and post-school outcomes. Grant dollars will support .05 of Dr. Messinger's FTE to defray at least some of the costs of her time commitments for cross-divisional collaboration efforts and membership of the OPI Management Team.

Project Coordinator (to be hired). A full time position tied exclusively to this project will be established with grant funds. This person will be located within OPI in order to facilitate the networking and coordination required to integrate the SIP into federal initiatives (e.g., Title I, School to Work) that are currently underway. A master's level person with knowledge of standards-based reform, statewide assessment, and disability will be recruited to fill this position. This individual will serve as the key link between the management team at OPI and the various initiatives and subcontractors associated with the implementation of the SIP.

Evaluation Coordinator (to be hired). This individual will work under the direction of Dr. Dori Nielson, supporting the efforts of the three data managers within OPI who will work to identify where there is duplication in their data requests to districts. They will collaboratively design forms

and procedures that encompass the data required for all federal program accountability, and create a unified system at the state level. The Evaluation Coordinator will provide training and technical assistance to local districts to support the streamlining of their approaches to data collection and reporting.

4.3 Qualifications of Project Consultants and Subcontractors

Abbreviated vitae for all identified project consultants and subcontractors are provided in Appendix C.

Parents Let's Unite for Kids

Dr. Katharin Kelker is the Director of PLUK, Montana's Parent Training Information Center. As detailed in her vitae, Dr. Kelker has served in a variety of direct service, administrative, and teaching roles in the area of disability. Under her direction, PLUK has grown into a strong statewide network of over 3,900 individuals and family members. Dr. Kelker oversees a broad array of services in the areas of information and referral, Parent Resource Library, monthly newsletters, training workshops, and individual assistance. She is well recognized across the state for her background, experience, and knowledge about disability.

Bitterroot Valley Cooperative

Tim Miller is the Director of this special education cooperative, overseeing the delivery of special education supports and technical assistance to a large region in Western Montana. He is well respected among his colleagues, currently serving as the President of SAM (Special Education Administrators of Montana). His Cooperative encompasses over 1,400 square miles, including very rural areas, as well as reasonably-sized towns (for Montana). He is known for his innovative approaches to service, and the creative solutions he and his staff are able to devise in their efforts to serve the districts in their Cooperative region. As Director, he has implemented innovative mental health services in school settings.

Rural Institute on Disabilities

At the Rural Institute, Dr. Gail McGregor will oversee the pilot implementation of the Low Incidence Support Team. She will draw upon other personnel and consultants that are part of a statewide network of adaptive equipment support that also operates under her direction. Dr. McGregor is trained and experienced in the areas of severe disabilities, assistive technology, and inclusive service practices/systems change. Other faculty within the Rural Institute (Dr. R. Timm Vogelsberg, Dr. Wendy Parent) and the Department of Curriculum and Instruction (Dr. Mike Jakupcak) will contribute to the university's efforts to develop and implement collaborative courses with faculty at MSU-Billings to create a broad array of training opportunities to support the professional development plans of teachers in the field in Montana. In addition, staff working with the Transition Technical Assistance Center for western Montana will be supported to provide training and technical assistance in the area of transition services.

Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center (MPRRC)

Montana is located within the region served by the Mountain Plains Regional Resource Center, and has benefited greatly from the supported provided by this RRC. Its director, Dr. John Copenhaver, is the MPRRC liaison assigned to provide technical assistance, information, and support to Montana. As the entity that has developed many of the needs assessments used to guide CSPD activities in this state, Dr. Copenhaver's commitment to serve on the project's evaluation team will be a great asset to the effort. His areas of particular interest and experience include: Section 504, SEA monitoring, CSPD, special populations, IEP training, procedural safeguards, state improvement grants and associated state improvement plans. John will participate in a consultative capacity in the quarterly meetings of the project evaluation team.

University of Montana- Missoula

Dr. Sue Forest, Research Associate in the Department of Psychology, Director of the Rural Family Support Specialist Training Program, Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Education, Social Work Department Faculty Affiliate, and Chair of the Human and Family Development Minor program, will have a contract with the project to enhance early intervention personnel preparation (pre-service and in-service) through both distance education and on-campus instruction with course credit. She has a PhD. in Human Development, Child and Family Studies with emphasis in Early Childhood Special Education. She has been providing interdisciplinary early intervention personnel preparation through a six course sequence for nine years at the University of Montana. Further, Dr. Forest is a member of Montana's Family Support Services Advisory Council (Part C Interagency Coordinating Council) and Comprehensive System for Personnel Development. In addition, she is involved with national and regional activities concerning early intervention (e.g., Zero-Three/National Center for Infants, Toddlers, and Families; Head Start consultant).

MSU-Billings

Dr. Mary Susan Fishbaugh, current chairperson of the Department of Special Education and Reading at MSU-Billings, will participate on the project evaluation team. She has considerable experience in the area of project evaluation, having designed evaluation plans for many of OPI's statewide initiatives. In addition, other faculty (e.g., Dr. Barbara Ayres - low incidence disabilities) will collaborate in the course development and implementation initiatives supported by this grant. Finally, staff at the Montana Center that currently work within the Transition Technical Assistance Center for eastern Montana will be supported to provide training and technical assistance activities in the area of transition services.

5.0 Adequacy of Resources

In this section of the narrative, the resources that the applicant and its collaborators bring to this project will be highlighted. In addition, the commitments and nature of involvement of each

partner, adequacy and cost-effectiveness of the project budget, and potential for continued support is described.

5.1 Adequacy of Support

Resources of the Office of Public Instruction

Each Division within the OPI has available to it the equipment, supplies and facilities necessary to support its daily operation. Basic project resources at OPI include: accessible facilities for offices, meetings, workshops and conferences; fully furnished office space for Project personnel; IBM-compatible computers and access to high-quality laser printers; direct connections or ready access to the Internet; access to media and graphic capabilities; toll free 1-800 telephone access and TDD access; high-quality copying equipment and printing services; and distance telephone conference capabilities. Perhaps the greatest resource that OPI has readily available for this project is the direct proximity of all key personnel responsible for the various Divisions whose efforts, collectively, shape school improvement in Montana. Personnel from the five Divisions central to this project are located on two floors of the same building in Helena. This creates the opportunity for both the formal collaboration detailed in the work scope of this plan, as well as the frequent, informal encounters that will foster ongoing communication.

Resources of Collaborating Partners

PLUK. Montana's parent training and information center was founded in 1984 by a small group of about 40 families. In the last 15 years, this network has grown to encompass families throughout the state. PLUK is governed by a twelve member board, consisting of 7 members who are parents of children with disabilities, and 5 professionals drawn from a variety of discipline. The organization has a main office in Billings, and 4 satellite offices operated by regionally based parent consultants. PLUK provides information to parents, one-on-one support and peer counseling, training workshops, support at school meetings, dissemination of materials, and a lending library.

University of Montana (UMT). Three units within the UMT will be contractual partners in the implementation of the SIP. The Rural Institute on Disabilities (RI) is a university-affiliated program with core funding from the Administration on Developmental Disabilities. It is part of a national network of programs with a mission to promote best practices and the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in school, work, and community settings. At the present time, there are approximately 38 funded projects operated within the RI that relate to this mission. Funded activities and resources available in conjunction with projects in the areas of transition, low incidence disabilities, inclusive schooling practices, and the statewide delivery of adaptive equipment services are of direct relevance to the role that the RI has agreed to play in the SIP. At the present time, a low incidence personnel preparation project, as well as a technical assistance center for the state's transition systems change project are among currently funded projects. The resources and staff of these projects will support SIP activities in these areas. The second partner is the Department of Psychology, the academic unit in which the training program for early intervention personnel is housed. Courses have been offered through this department to train FSSs for over 6 years. In its last funding cycle, considerable effort and resources were focused on developing distance learning formats for a number of components of this training sequence. The university's computer systems and technical resources adequately support this course delivery format. Finally, faculty of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction will participate in the collaborative course development and implementation supported by this project. Faculty with expertise in special education (e.g., Dr. Timm Vogelsberg, Dr. Gail McGregor, Dr. Mike Jakupcak), as well as general education will participate in this initiative.

MSU-Billings. Two units within this university will be involved in the implementation of SIP initiatives. First, the Montana Center, located at MSU-Billings, houses one of the state's two Transition Technical Assistance Centers. The staff and resources of this Center will be utilized to

support the training and technical assistance initiative in the area of transition. Second, faculty of the Department of Special Education and Reading will collaborate with personnel from UMT to develop and delivery distance-based courses in areas that are aligned with identified state priorities in the area of professional development.

Bitterroot Valley Educational Cooperative. This special education cooperative has provided support to 6 school districts in Western Montana since 1979. The Coop has well established links to adult service and community providers. It is the strength of these relationships that has enabled the Bitterroot Valley Cooperative to develop unique interagency linkages to meet the mental health support needs of students in the districts they serve. In addition to highly skilled and experienced staff, the Cooperative is fully accessible, and is furnished with up-to-date equipment to support its technical assistance and training efforts.

Regional CSPD Councils. Montana is divided into 5 regions for the purpose of its CSPD. Each region has a CSPD Council that is comprised of diverse stakeholders (e.g., general educators, special educators, family members, higher ed personnel). These Councils have the responsibility of identifying professional development needs within their region. With an annual allocation of dollars from OPI, they then plan activities to respond to these needs. These activities range from Summer Institutes to school planning dollars to stipends for people to attend training out of state. This design is very effective in Montana, representing a cost-effective way to respond to the unique needs of each part of the state. There is strong commitment among the regions for this approach, capitalizing upon Montana's tradition of active involvement and locally-driven decision making. As indicated in letters in Appendix A, all Councils have expressed strong support for this effort, and will work to align their efforts to support targeted areas of improvement. Further, the CSPD structure will be utilized to plan and deliver support relative to what was previously considered "general education" based initiatives (e.g., Title I school improvement, standards-based reform).

5.2 Commitment of Partners to the SIP

The specific commitments of contractual partners to the SIP are detailed in the partnerships agreement included in Appendix B. The information provided in Table 8 enables the reader to see how the efforts of these various entities will, collectively, come together to implement the various initiatives described in this proposal. This relationship illustrates the relevance of the efforts of each partner in achieving project goals. In addition, there are other collaborative partnerships that do not involve a contract and direct exchange of dollars from the SIG. These include the relationships and agreements that are in place with out-of-state training institutions for the purpose of preparing educational interpreters (Front Range Community College), OTs (Eastern Washington University), and SLPs (University of North Dakota - Minot). All of these efforts directly link to the achievement of objectives tied to project Goal 3. These commitments are described in letters of support and agreements in Appendices A and B.

5.3 Adequacy of Budget

A detailed description of all of the costs tied to this project is provided in the Budget Narrative section at the front of this proposal. The budget has been thoughtfully put together to balance the need to integrate SIP initiatives within the larger arena of educational reform in Montana, with the need to target specific areas of identified weakness in the delivery of services to students with disabilities. As specified in the RFP, more than 75% of the funds requested to support the implementation of Montana's SIP focus on professional development. This addresses many of the critical needs identified in Section 1 of this proposal.

TABLE 8. Involvement of Collaborating Partners in SIP Initiatives

Goal Areas/SIP Initiatives	Contractual Partners and Consultants								
	PLUK	UMT/Psych	UMT/RI	UMT/C & I	Reg CSPD	MSU/MC	MSU/SP & R	BVC	Cslt
Standards-Based Reform									
Develop documents about standards, assessment, and students with disabilities.	X		X						X
Dissemination/provide training in this area.	X		X	X	X		X		
Development of alternative assessment.	X		X				X		X
Develop guidelines for alternative assessment.			X						
School pilot projects.			X						
Shift monitoring focus to school planning and improvement.									X
Collaboration with School-to-Work			X			X			

Goal Areas/SIP Initiatives	Contractual Partners and Consultants								
	PLUK	UMT/Psych	UMT/RI	UMT/C & I	Reg CSPD	MSU/MC	MSU/SP & R	BVC	Cslt
Outcomes for Students with Disabilities									
Low Incidence Support Team			X						
Transition training and technical assistance			X			X			
Interagency work groups to improve Transition outcomes			X			X			
School-based mental health supports								X	
Positive behavioral support training & TA	X			X			X	X	X
Personnel Initiatives									
New coursework for special educators				X			X		
New coursework for general educators, focused on accommodating diversity				X			X		
Consider need for reciprocity agreements for teachers				X			X		
Regional training opportunities			X		X	X		X	X

5.4 Cost Effectiveness of Project

Cost effectiveness is evaluated by comparing expenses with anticipated outcomes. In Montana, where resources are always scare in the area of education, a little goes a long way. This is evidenced in this plan in terms of the number and significance of initiatives that are supported with project funding. SIG funds will expand the scope and impact of ongoing school improvement initiatives, but will not support the basic initiatives themselves. In this way, the project builds upon the resources and expertise of existing structures and personnel in the state, leveraging SIG dollars to produce both the incremental and fundamental changes necessary to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in Montana. The reliance upon out-of-state consultants to serve as a catalyst in areas in which in-state expertise is lacking also illustrates the strategic thinking that has gone into preparing this project work scope and budget. Where consultants are used, their work will be designed to increase in-state capacity rather than to come in and simply "do for" in-state personnel. In this way, these dollars represent an investment in Montana school personnel. Finally, personnel and professional development has been examined from a longitudinal perspective. As a result, initiatives are focused at multiple points along the cycle of personnel preparation. SIG dollars will be invested in the system that is responsible for preservice personnel preparation, as well as the inservice and ongoing professional development structures. While inservice training - a relatively costly approach to professional development - will always be necessary in order to promote continuous learning among educators, dollars for this type of training can be more focused on building/community-specific needs as the training provided within the state's IHEs becomes more closely aligned with the needs of the field. Through the efforts of the SIG, this is the intended outcome in Montana.

5.5 Potential for Sustainability

Funding for this SIG is carefully targeted to increase the capacity of existing structures to align and coordinate their efforts to maximize efficiency and improve outcomes for students with disabilities. Project initiatives involve all key players in the system that deliver services to students and their families in Montana across their life span. As a result, the partners involved in the initiatives encompassed in this project are the very same entities that are charged with the responsibility of providing supports to students with disabilities after this period of federal funding is over. Therefore, it is highly likely that changes that are adopted, effective partnerships that are established, and new skills that are developed will continue to be implemented far beyond the time when funding for this project ends.

6.0 Management Plan

In this section, the organization and operation of the general operating procedures of the project are described, including the planned approach to management and monitoring of project activities, and the distribution of responsibilities across project participants and subcontractors. The different ways in which broad-based input will be gathered about project implementation and outcomes is also described.

6.1 Achieving Project Objectives On Time and Within Budget.

Organizational Structure.

Figure 2 depicts the organizational structure for the project. The project is organized to promote effective communication and accountability linkages across all partners to ensure that project goals, objectives and activities are implemented, monitored, and completed in a timely manner, according to budget. Mr. Bob Runkel, Administrator of Special Education Services, is responsible for all programs and projects in the Office of Public Instruction's Special Education Division. He will be a key member of the project's Management Team. The Project Director will be directly responsible to the director of Special Education and will provide leadership for the daily operation of the project and will direct and monitor the project's work and budget according to the management system described in the next section. The Project Coordinator will work directly with the Project Director. While

these key personnel will work together on a daily basis concerning project planning and implementation, they will meet weekly to monitor project activities. This group will be responsible for executive decisions about the project.

The Project Director will provide leadership for the Management Team concerning project activities. In addition to the Project Director, the Management Team members will include the OPI Administrators for the Divisions of Special Education; School Improvement; Educational Opportunity and Equity Programs; Measurement and Accountability; Career, Vocational and Adult Services; and Health Enhancement and Safety. The Management Team will meet on at least a monthly basis, with a specific schedule to be determined through the management system process. The focus of these meetings will be on project planning, implementation and monitoring, including evaluation, to ensure the connection of project goals and objectives with school improvement and reform efforts in Montana.

An Evaluation Team will be established for this project. Dr. Dori Nelsen, OPI's Administrator for the Division of Measurement and Accountability and member of the Management Team, will provide leadership for the Evaluation Team and direct the activities of the Evaluation and Assessment Coordinator. The membership of the Evaluation Team and the evaluation activities are described in Section 7. Project Evaluation.

FIGURE 2. Organizational Structure for the Project

Special Education Division
Office of Public Instruction
Robert Runkel, Administrator

State Improvement Plan Project

| Project Coordinator (To Be Hired) | Project Director Susan Bailey Anderson | Administrative Assistant (To Be Hired) |

Project Subcontractors
- PLUK - Parents Let's Unite for Kids
- Bitterroot Valley Special Education Cooperative
- Rural Institute on Disabilities
- The University of Montana Family Support Specialist Training Program
- Montana State University - Billings Department of Special Education
- Regional - CSPD Councils

Management Team
- Susan Bailey Anderson   Robert Runkel
  Special Education
- Linda Vrooman Peterson
  School Improvement
- B.J. Granbery
  Educational Opportunity and Equity Programs
- Dori Nielson
  Measurement and Accountability
- Jody Messinger
  Career, Vocational and Adults Services
- Spencer Sartorius
  Health Enhancement and Safety

Advisory Committee
- Special Education Advisory Panel
- Comprehensive System for Personnel Development

Initiative Teams (I-Teams) will be established for related objectives within each of the project's three goal areas. The Special Education Administrator and Project Director will finalize the membership of each I-Team, drawn from the agencies and groups that have been identified as collaborating partners. Table 9 identifies partners responsible for planning, implementing and evaluating each of the project's objectives. Each I-Team will establish their own meeting schedule and conduct their efforts in accordance to the project's management system (p. 72). The Project Coordinator and Project Director will divide liaison responsibilities with the I-Teams, such that each I-Team has an OPI contact person that serves as a conduit to the Project's management team.

Contracts with collaborating partners will be established, developed, and monitored according to the guidelines set in place for the Office of Public Instruction. Table 8 in the previous section delineates key contractual partners and the specific initiatives with which they will be associated. The Budget Narrative includes information about the fiscal arrangements for each collaborating partners.

Representatives of the Special Education Advisory Panel and Montana's State CSPD will form a joint Advisory Committee for the project (See section 6.2, p. 79, Appendix H and Table 6 in Section 3 for additional detail). The Project Director will meet with the Advisory Committee quarterly to seek their counsel and advice on the project goals, objectives and activities, and to involve them in implementing project activities through the schools, universities, organizations and agencies they represent.

Management System

The project, including the Management Team, I-Teams, and contractors, will use a management system based on Hinrichs and Taylors (1969) Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS) to monitor the project's accomplishments and expenditures. The PPBS has proven to be an effective tool for continuous managerial performance feedback and oversight for daily management and decision-making. It facilitates effective project management at all project levels and promotes ongoing project evaluation so activities and resources (fiscal and personnel) can be redirected when needed. The project's evaluation system (see Section 7) is built into and facilitates the effectiveness of the PPBS for project management and helps to ensure ongoing feedback and

continuous improvement of project operations. Steps in the PPBS are as follows: **1)** Project objectives are specified, analyzed, and based on the project's goals. **2)** Activities are analyzed and specified for each objective. Alternatives and *budgets* for accomplishing objectives are explored to determine effective and economical methods for achieving the goals. Preferred combinations are selected as project activities. *Project personnel determine responsibility assignments for activities and establish timelines.* These activities, responsibility assignments, and timelines guide project implementation and become the basis for determining performance status, and providing feedback for continuous improvement. Activities may be added, redefined, or dropped if project evaluation indicates alternative action is required. **3)** Implementation of project goals, objectives and activities is initiated and monitored weekly through project meetings and individual reporting. Minor adjustments are made and communicated across project personnel; **4)** Quarterly progress checks evaluate program status and accomplishments by **a)** monitoring status of activities planned and completed, activities scheduled but not completed are evaluated to determine appropriate actions; **b)** determining the percentages of activities in progress or accomplished; and **c)** monitoring the timelines of each implemented activity, reallocation of resources/budget will occur if necessary, and the progress reports will help determine if corrective management is necessary. **5)** Recommendations from the above evaluation component are communicated across project personnel-partners and implemented. Project activities that continue unchanged, loop again through Components 3, 4 and 5 (above). If activities/timelines need to be modified, the loop will begin at Component 2 (above) and loop through Component 5.

The PPBS will also serve as the vehicle to evaluate, with project personnel and partners, the project's goals, objectives, activities and budget at the beginning of each project year. This will ensure that the project remains responsive to the steps necessary to accomplish the goals and outcomes. The PPBS provides the mechanism to ensure that information and feedback is communicated across all project partners, and is designed to promote continuous improvement in project operations. The project's goals, objectives, and outcomes are delineated in Section 3.1 of this narrative. The specific activities, timelines, and responsibility assignments can be found in Appendix K.

<u>Responsibilities and Timelines</u>

       Table 9 displays the project's goals, objectives, responsibility assignments and timelines. Responsibility assignments are coded: **PD** - Project Director, **PC** - Project Coordinator, **MT** -Management Team, **IT** - Initiative Teams, **AC** - Advisory Committee, **CSPD** - Comprehensive System for Personnel Development, **RCSPD** - Regional Comprehensive System for Personnel Development, **PLUK** - Montana's Parent Training and Information Center, **MUS** - Montana University System, **LEA** - Local Education Agency. Timelines are designated with the start date for the first year and marked for each year activities for the objective continue to be implemented. Appendix K provides a list of detailed activities for each goal and objective, projected timelines for the activities, and responsibility assignments.

Table 9: Project Goals, Responsibility Assignments, and Timelines by Years

<table>
<tr><td colspan="6">Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel and policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Objectives for Goal 1</td><td colspan="5">Responsibility and Timelines by Years</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">1.1 Use multiple methods to assist educators in aligning local curricula and instructional practices to state standards, demonstrating their applicability to the learning needs of students with identified disabilities.</td><td colspan="5">PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA</td></tr>
<tr><td>2000</td><td>2001
1/15</td><td>2002</td><td>2000</td><td>2001</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">1.2 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to ensure that the needs of students with disabilities are being addressed in school improvement initiatives.</td><td colspan="5">PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA</td></tr>
<tr><td>2000
10/1</td><td>2001</td><td>2002</td><td>2003</td><td>2004</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">1.3 Clarify requirements and improve current levels of practice regarding the involvement of students with disabilities in statewide assessments.</td><td colspan="5">PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA</td></tr>
<tr><td>2000</td><td>2001
1/15</td><td>2002</td><td>2003</td><td>2004</td></tr>
<tr><td>1.4 Provide assistance and training to LEAs to</td><td colspan="5">PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA</td></tr>
</table>

Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel and policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of Montana's school reform activities at the state and local levels.					
ensure that students with disabilities are involved in statewide assessment systems.	2000	2001 1/15	2002	2003	2004
1.5 Establish clear expectations for improved achievement for students with disabilities relative to the general education curriculum.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA				
	2000	2001 2/1	2002	2003	2004
1.6 Develop an integrated management information system that brings together data collected by general education, special education, and vocational education divisions of the Office of Public Instruction.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, LEA				
	2000	2001 3/1	2002	2003	2004
1.7 Link monitoring practices to the school improvement process, supporting LEAs in their efforts to use accountability data to evaluate school performance and identify areas in need of improvement.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, LEA				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004

Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Objectives for Goal 2	Responsibility and Timelines by Years				
2.1 Coordinate information dissemination, technical assistance, and training efforts to focus on improved transition planning for students with disabilities.	PD, PC, MT, AC				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
2.2 Support interagency collaboration at the state and local level to make available necessary services and supports for students with disabilities and their families.	PD, PC, MT, AC, CSPD, RCSPD, LEA				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
2.3 Support the replication and refinement of a collaborative model to deliver school-based mental health services to students with emotional support needs.	PD, PC, IT, AC, CSPD, RCSD				
	2000 11/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
2.4 Investigate the fiscal and programmatic feasibility of a Low Incidence Support Team to provide on-site technical assistance and training in dealing with the unique needs of students who "stress" the system.	PD, PC, IT, AC				
	2000 1/15	2001	2002	2003	2004

Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

2.5 Strengthen the infrastructure of the regional CSPD Councils, supporting them in their efforts to identify and respond to priority professional development needs within their regions.	PD, PC, IT, CSPD, RCPD, PLUK				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004

Goal 3: Personnel Retention/Recruitment and Professional Development. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.

Objectives for Goal 3	**Responsibility and Timelines by Years**				
3.1 Implement collaborative agreements with personnel preparation programs in other states to alleviate shortages in the areas of related services and educational interpreters.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, MUS				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
3.2 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to increase opportunities for a planned course of graduate study that furthers professional development and lifelong learning for teachers.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, MUS				
	2000 10/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
3.3 Collaborate with institutions of higher	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, MUS				

Goal 3: Personnel Retention/Recruitment and Professional Development. Schools across Montana will be staffed with a sufficient number of trained personnel to provide special education and related services to students with disabilities.					
Objectives for Goal 3	**Responsibility and Timelines by Years**				
education to provide new mechanisms and approaches to increase the ability of general educators to respond to the needs of students with disabilities.	2000 10/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
3.4 Address barriers to the recruitment of special education teachers through changes in certification requirements.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC				
	2000 3/1	2001	2002	2003	2004
3.5 Collaborate with institutions of higher education to provide preservice training and ongoing professional development for personnel who work within the early intervention system.	PD, PC, MT, IT, AC, CSPD, MUS				
	2000 8/1	2001	2002	2003	2004

6.2 Diversity of Perspectives In Project Activities

Integral to the design of the project, the management plan (PPBS) and evaluation plan is incorporating a diverse set of perspectives in all project operations. Project personnel and partners include a diverse set of stakeholders who will be involved in project planning, implementation and evaluation, and provide ongoing advice and feedback. The OPI ensures that the perspectives of students, families, teachers, school administrators, business community, multiple disciplinary and professional fields, recipients and beneficiaries of services, and under-represented groups are incorporated into project operations through project partners (e.g., Montana's PTI Center - PLUK) and representation on the project's Management Team, Work Teams and Advisory Committee.

Project Advisory Committee membership will be drawn from Montana's Special Education Advisory Council and State CSPD Council (See Appendix H for membership rosters.) The Advisory Committee will formally meet on a quarterly basis. In addition, members will interact and work on project tasks between meetings through various methods (e.g., electronic communications, conference calls). Further, as representatives of other organizations and agencies, Advisory Committee members will communicate with and involve other members of those organizations and agencies in mutually beneficial project activities. As detailed in Table 6 (Section 3.3), membership of those groups include: students with disabilities, parents with children in Part C and B services, teachers, special education teachers, para-educators, special education and school administrators, Part C State Coordinator, business CEO, higher education faculty and minority achievement coordinators, related service occupations (e.g., speech and language specialist, occupational and physical therapists), vocational rehabilitation, mental health and developmental disabilities programs, and State Legislator. It should be noted that these groups include members from traditionally under-represented groups, including members with disabilities and Native Americans.

There are additional avenues through which a variety of perspectives will feed into project structures. First, Management Team members and partners as well as members of the Advisory Committee participate with many other advisory committees that provide a forum in which information can be shared and feedback sought about

project activities. Examples of such linkages include the Family Support Services Advisory Council (Part C Interagency Coordinating Council), Developmental Disabilities Planning and Advisory Council, Montana Educational Associations (i.e., School Administrators of Montana, Montana Association of School Psychologists), State Transition Coordinating Council, Vocational Rehabilitation Advisory Council, School-to-Work Advisory Council and other relevant organizations. Second, the project's evaluation plan outlines methods to seek input and feedback concerning project activities, outcomes and products from stakeholders, including the various recipients of project services. (See Section 7 for details concerning the evaluation plan.).

7.0 Project Evaluation

As described in IDEA, the purpose of this funding program is to support individual states in their efforts to establish partnerships with those entities involved in initiatives to improve their system of delivering educational services and other essential supports to young children and students with disabilities. Toward that end, the essential question that guides the design of this project, including its evaluation, is as follows:

Do school reform efforts in Montana result in improved educational and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities?

The work scope of this project has been organized around three major activity strands that represent reasonable and logical avenues to lead to the desired outcome of improved students outcomes. The objectives established within these three areas represent incremental steps that lead to goal attainment. The evaluation plan for this project focuses on three levels. First, data about critical student indicators will be compiled on an annual basis to respond to the essential question that serves as the project's foundation, i.e., *do outcomes improve for students with disabilities*? Evaluation strategies are detailed in the next section. Second, data will be gathered on an ongoing basis about the impact of each of the project initiatives intended to contribute to student success. These strategies are described in Section 7.2 Finally, the PPBS management system adopted for this project will serve as the vehicle through which continuous monitoring of project accomplishments and expenditures can occur. This approach is described in section 7.3. This is followed by a brief review of the types of data that, collectively, informs project evaluation.

7.1 Project Evaluation Methods

A project evaluation committee will oversee the collection, compilation, and dissemination of data gathered to assess Montana's progress in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. This committee will consist of individuals who are and are not involved in the implementation of project activities. The committee will be chaired by Dr. Dori Nielson, the Director of the Division of Measurement and Accountability for OPI. Other members that can be identified at this time, and their area of contribution, are described in Table 10. Committee membership will be revisited when the project begins to assure appropriate representation. The committee will meet on a quarterly basis, with communication occurring between meetings via e-mail and conference calls.

Table 10: Evaluation Team Membership

Name	Area of Expertise
Dr. Dori Nielson	Statewide assessment; author of Montana Statewide Education Profile
Dr. John Copenhaver	State improvement initiatives; IDEA implementation
Dr. Katharin Kelker	Family information and support
Dr. Mary Susan Fishbaugh	Evaluation of statewide initiatives; teacher preparation
Dr. R. Timm Vogelsberg	Transition; low incidence disabilities
Dr. Gail McGregor	Low incidence disabilities; standards-based reform & students with disabilities

This team will be responsible for bringing together the multiple sources of data that describe outcomes for students with disabilities from multiple perspectives. On an annual basis, these data will compiled for broad-based dissemination and feedback. In addition to data gathered by personnel responsible for the individual initiatives

encompassed in this project (see next section), this group will examine and compare outcome data for students with

and without disabilities relative to outcome indicators described in Table 2 in the Need section of this proposal.

Their immediate priority will be to develop data collection strategies for those areas in which baseline data are

currently not being collected in Montana (e.g., participation of students with disabilities in post-secondary education;

post-school employment outcomes for students with disabilities). In order to accomplish this, evaluation team

members with expertise in these areas will work with initiative personnel to develop data collection strategies. For

instance, evaluation team member Dr. Timm Vogelsberg will collaborate with personnel from the two transition

technical assistance centers in designing follow-up surveys to gather information about post-secondary employment

and education rates for students with disabilities. A second priority is to identify data about students with disabilities

that should be included in Montana's Statewide Education Profile, the states summary of the performance of

Montana schools. Finally, the team will determine the parameters of a more detailed annual profile that they will

compile that focuses on outcomes for students with disabilities.

7.2 Evaluation of Project Implementation Strategies

In addition to this "big picture" analysis of the outcomes of Montana's State Improvement Plan, evaluation

of all project activities and initiatives will be undertaken. Evaluation approaches will be designed by initiative

personnel and reviewed by the evaluation committee prior to beginning implementation. Table 11 includes the

evaluation questions that will be asked about each project objective and associated activities, as well as identifying

data sources and measurement approaches.

TABLE 11. Evaluation Plan to Measure Project Outcomes

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 1: Standards-Based Reform. Personnel & policy makers responsible for the education of students with disabilities(s/w/d) will work as partners with general educators in the development, implementation, and continued refinement of MT's school reform activities.			
1.1: Written guidelines & professional development activities focused on the link between standards and curricula	1.1(a) *Do school personnel and families find the written information developed to articulate the relationship between standards and programs for students with disabilities helpful to them?* 1.1(b) *Do school personnel and families find the professional development activities designed to articulate the relationship between standards and programs for s/w/d helpful to them?*	(a) Product evaluations (b) Training & TA evaluations	(a) Post card format of product evaluation will be attached to documents distributed to gather feedback from recipients (b) Project evaluations will be distributed to all participants in group training; sample will receive follow-up survey to assess implementation questions

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
1.2: TA to schools involved in comprehensive reform; dissemination of information about successful local curricular approaches	1.2(a) *Are schools successful in their efforts to align local curricula with state standards in a way that includes all students?* 1.2(b) *What successful strategies are used in districts across MT?*	Case study description of sample of school sites	Ongoing documentation of strategies used by small sample of schools involved in comprehensive school reform demonstration
1.3: Written guidelines & professional development activities about statewide assessment requirements	1.1(a) *Do school personnel and families find the written information about statewide assessment and s/w/d helpful?* 1.1(b) *Do school personnel and families find the professional development activities about statewide assessment and s/w/d helpful?*	(a) Product evaluations (b) Training & TA evaluations	Same as approach for 1.1(a) and 1.1(b)

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
1.4: TA to schools involved in comprehensive reform; dissemination of information about successful local assessment practices	1.4(a) *Are schools successful in involving students with disabilities in statewide assessment?* 1.4(b) *What successful strategies are used in districts across Montana?*	Annual data reports submitted to OPI	Annual compilation of data for state to examine rate of involvement; individual school profiles generated for local improvement planning
1.5: Clear performance goals for s/w/d that reflect measurable improvement over baseline levels	1.5(a) *How successful are Montana s/w/d relative to identified state performance standards?* 1.5(b) *Does the performance of students with disabilities improve across time as a result of school improvement initiatives?*	Annual data reports submitted to OPI about performance of s/w/d	Annual compilation of data for state to examine performance trends; individual school profiles generated for local improvement planning

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
1.6: An integrated data management systems at the SEA; integrated systems at the local level	1.6(a) *Are separate information systems for federal programs merged at the SEA level?* 1.6(b) *Are LEAs able to integrate their data reporting activities and provide required data?*	(a) PPBS management system reviews (b) TA records; reports from LEAs	(a) Task completion is monitored via project management system (b) Case description of LEAs receiving support to merge data systems
1.7: An improvement-based model of LEA monitoring used by OPI staff	1.7(a) *Is an improvement-based approach to monitoring adopted by OPI and used statewide?* 1.7(b) *How satisfied are LEAs with this new approach to monitoring?*	(a) OPI monitoring records (b) Feedback gathered from LEA personnel	(a) Task completion is monitored via project management system (b) Develop LEA follow-up survey distributed after OPI on-site visits

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.			
2.1: Improved quality of transition plans; creation of follow-up mechanism for local district use	2.1(a) *Does the quality of transition plans improve as a result of transition initiatives supported by the SIG?* 2.1(b) *Do districts adopt strategies to incorporate follow-up data collection as part of their school improvement efforts?*	(a) Transition plans from sample of districts (b) TA records; data voluntarily submitted to OPI	(a) Collect sample of transition plans for qualitative review during LEA monitoring (b) Records maintained by Transition TA Center personnel; annual summary of information submitted to OPI

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.			
2.2: Consistent involvement of adult service providers in transition planning; decrease in drop-out rates for s/w/d; increase in post-school employment and education	2.2(a) *Are adult service providers attending transition planning sessions for high school students?* 2.2(b) *What trends are seen in drop-out rates and post-school employment & education across the duration of this project?*	(a) IEP attendance lists (b) Data submitted by LEAs to OPI annually	(a) Collect information as part of on-site monitoring of LEAs (b) Compile annually and examine trends across time; disaggregate based on disability

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.			
2.3: Development of collaborative models to deliver school-based mental health supports	(a) *Are strategies successfully implemented in one region of the state "portable" to others?* (b) *What new models emerge in efforts to support regions to develop strategies to provide these services?*	TA documentation; training follow-up	(a) TA provider will maintain records of implementation approaches developed by LEAs; (b) develop case study descriptions for dissemination

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.			
2.4: Pilot of Low Incidence Support Team in two regions; cost-benefit analysis; secure funding for expansion	(a) *How successful is this approach in supporting personnel to meet the needs of students with low incidence disabilities?* (b) *How costly is this approach? Is it feasible to expand to other regions?*	(a) student program and performance data; staff feedback (b) records of time and travel to serve each student	(a) Pre/post analysis of program quality, student performance and behavior; staff/family questionnaire to gather their perceptions of comfort/satisfaction (b) maintain detailed records for each student to establish "average" costs

Desired Outcome	Evaluation Question	Source of Data	Measurement Approach
Goal 2: Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. General and special educators, families, and other agencies that support young children and students with disabilities will collaborate to efficiently use resources and align efforts to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.			
2.5: An administrative structure within each CSPD region; increased opportunities for professional development	(a) *Do regional CSPD Councils have adequate support to identify and coordinate regionally responsive professional development?* (b) *Are the professional development needs in each region being addressed through CSPD activities?*	(a) annual CSPD council survey (b) annual CSPD survey	(a) Survey regional CSPD council members on an annual basis (b) Survey school personnel and family members on an annual basis to identify training needs/satisfaction

7.3 Use of Evaluation Data for Ongoing Feedback and Project Planning

Data will be gathered in a formative manner to inform project planning and assist in decision-making. Project staff and subcontracts will use the PPBS management system described in Section 6 of this proposal. This system involves a monthly review of accomplishments and expenditures to ensure that project activities are on track and within budget. This also provides an opportunity to review outcome data that are being collected on a regular basis, rather than waiting longer periods of time to review accomplishment and, perhaps, miss important opportunities to make necessary adjustments in implementation strategies to improve outcomes. Data from individual project initiatives will be forwarded to the Evaluation Committee on a semi-annual basis, allowing for another level of review and feedback on a regular basis. The Evaluation Committee will be responsible for reporting and discussing outcome data with the Project Advisory Committee. As described in Section 6, this group will be drawn from two existing state-level advisory committees that are comprised of personnel representing a full range of stakeholder groups (See Appendix H). Finally, information about project outcomes will be integrated into the Statewide Education Profile, the official document disseminated by OPI to inform the public about the performance of Montana schools.

7.4 Use of Objective Performance Measures

The performance indicators that will be used to describe the outcomes experienced by students with disabilities in Montana are objective measures clearly related to intended student outcomes. While a single measure does not provide a complete and accurate picture of student outcomes, the combination of multiple measures begins to create a more complete profile. In addition to the measures identified in Table 11, the evaluation team will consider the following objective indicators of student outcomes across the duration of this project: (a) performance of students with disabilities on statewide assessments; (b)

proportion of students with disabilities participating in statewide assessments; (c) performance of students with disabilities on alternative assessments; (d) drop out rates for students with disabilities; (e) graduation rates for students with disabilities; (e) rates of participation in post-secondary education programs; and (f) post-school employment of students with disabilities.

7.5 Quantitative and Qualitative Evaluation Data

A review of the evaluation data that will be collected (see Table 11 and previous discussion) indicates that both quantitative and qualitative sources of data will be considered. Furthermore, data will be collected from multiple sources to create a rich picture about the effectiveness of the system from multiple perspectives. This includes students (e.g., performance, graduation, drop-out); teachers (e.g., training needs, satisfaction with training and technical assistance); Family Support Specialists (e.g., training needs, portfolio reviews); family members (e.g., satisfaction with information and training); teacher trainers (e.g., course evaluations, student follow-up); individual schools and districts (e.g., school performance profiles; satisfaction with monitoring), and the state system itself (e.g., changes in policies and practices; effectiveness of interagency collaboration). Finally, repeated measurement schedules will enable as assessment to be made about progress across time. Collectively, this data will create a picture of services and outcomes for students with disabilities in Montana that has both breadth and depth.